

COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the County Council held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin LL15 1YN on Tuesday, 10 June 2014 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Raymond Bartley, Brian Blakeley (Chair), Bill Cowie, James Davies, Meirick Davies, Richard Davies, Stuart Davies, Hugh Evans, Bobby Feeley, Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Martyn Holland, Rhys Hughes, Hugh Irving, Huw Jones, Pat Jones, Gwyneth Kensler (Vice-Chair), Geraint Lloyd-Williams, Margaret McCarroll, Jason McLellan, Barry Mellor, Win Mullen-James, Peter Owen, Dewi Owens, Merfyn Parry, Paul Penlington, Arwel Roberts, Gareth Sandilands, Barbara Smith, David Smith, Julian Thompson-Hill, Joe Welch, Cefyn Williams, Cheryl Williams, Eryl Williams and Huw Williams

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (MM), Head of Legal & Democratic Services (GW), Head of Strategic Human Resources (LA), Financial Inclusion Anti-Poverty Manager (SL), Democratic Services Manager (SP) and Committee Administrator (SLW)

Also in attendance were:

Gwilym Bury – Welsh Audit Office
Lesley Powell – Chief Executive Officer, Denbighshire Citizens Advice Bureau
Paul Roberts – Money Advice Manager, Denbighshire Citizens Advice Bureau
Colette Tamblyn – Senior Caseworker, Denbighshire Citizens Advice Bureau

1 CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU PRESENTATION

Prior to the commencement of the Full Council meeting, a presentation by Representatives of Denbighshire Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) took place to emphasise the work undertaken by staff concerning Debt. The Denbighshire CAB team had recently won the “UK Debt Team of the Year” award and were runner-up of the “Best New Initiative Category”.

The representatives in attendance were as follows:

- Lesley Powell, Chief Executive Officer
- Paul Roberts, Money Advice Manager
- Colette Tamblyn, Senior Caseworker

Congratulations from Full Council were offered to the CAB representatives as they were proud to know Denbighshire had the best CAB in the UK.

2 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ian Armstrong, Joan Butterfield, Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones, Ann Davies, Peter Duffy, Peter Evans, Carys Guy, Colin Hughes, Alice Jones, Bob Murray, David Simmons and Bill Tasker

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Cheryl Williams, Stuart Davies, Barbara Smith, Bobby Feeley, Gwyneth Kensler, Hugh Evans, Paul Penlington, Gareth Sandilands and Huw Jones all declared a personal interest in Item 8 – Local Government Pension Scheme.

4 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters.

QUESTION PUT FORWARD BY COUNCILLOR MEIRICK LLOYD DAVIES

At this juncture, the Head of Legal & Democratic Services explained that within the Constitution, a Member could ask a question, provided they had given two working days' notice of the question to the Chief Executive. The question would not be for debate. The Councillor would be allowed to ask the question, a verbal or written response would be given and the Councillor would then have the opportunity to a verbal comeback if required.

Councillor Meirick Lloyd Davies asked the following question:

Standing Order (8) Questions by Members

Sub-section (8:2) and (8:3)

Complaints had been received that we, as a county, are refusing paid transport from Llanrhaeadr near Denbigh, Llandyrnog, Saron and Prion.

Letter from the Headmaster of Ysgol Glan Clwyd, Welsh medium school, Martin Davies, and the Governors, registering their concerns about the inflexible way in which the County interprets the Education Support Rules May 2014.

- 1) *Was a meeting held between the Head of Education and the Governors of Ysgol Glan Clwyd ?*
- 2) *What were the outcomes ?*
- 3) *Under Transport, the description is - "attending their nearest SUITABLE school". Ysgol Glan Clwyd is a full Welsh medium school. Ysgol Brynhyfryd, partly Welsh medium (80% Welsh medium stream). The parents have applied for full Welsh medium education in a Welsh environment/ethos including Music, Choir, sports etc. Why are you refusing the children the school that provides this – Ysgol Glan Clwyd, by not providing paid transport by the county?*

The Lead Member for Education, Councillor Eryl Williams responded that within the Council Policy, both Ysgol Glan Clwyd and Ysgol Brynhyfryd were named as Welsh medium schools and both were up to standard in terms of Welsh education. There would be a meeting convened following Cabinet on Tuesday, 24 June, 2014. All Councillors were invited to attend. Officers would be in attendance to respond to the question raised.

Councillor Meirick Lloyd Davies requested a response to all questions.

Councillor Eryl Williams explained he could not give a response but a response would be forthcoming at the meeting on the 24 June 2014.

The Head of Legal & Democratic Services confirmed a written response would follow.

5 CHAIRMAN'S DIARY

A list of civic engagements undertaken by both the previous Chair and the current Chair together with the Vice-Chair for the period 26 April 2014 – 27 May 2014 had been circulated prior to the meeting.

The Chair informed members of the Queen's Baton Relay Even which had taken place in Rhyl recently. The event had been extremely successful, attracting huge numbers of people to Rhyl.

The Chair also extended his gratitude to Garry Davies, Countryside Officer (North) and his Team, for the work they had carried out at the Marsh Tracks facility in Rhyl.

***RESOLVED** that the list of civic engagements undertaken for the Council by the Chair and Vice-Chair be received, and comments of the Chair be noted.*

6 MINUTES

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 13 May 2014 were submitted.

Councillor Meirick Lloyd Davies raised the issue of not receiving any information regarding comparison of salaries in Westminster and Cardiff which had been raised at the meeting held on 13 May 2014.

The Chief Executive confirmed he would circulate the information to members prior to the end of the week. Apologies were given as he had not realised the information had been required for the 10 June 2014 meeting.

Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts – Item 10. During the presentation Councillor Hilditch-Roberts had referred to members attending only part of meetings which had not been noted in the minutes.

***RESOLVED** that subject to the above, the minutes of the Council meeting held on 13 May, 2014, be confirmed as a correct record.*

7 FINANCIAL INCLUSION TOGETHER (FIT) PROJECT

The Lead Member for Customers and Communities, Councillor Hugh Irving, presented a report (previously circulated) to provide members with information regarding the Financial Inclusion Together (FIT) Project and encourage Council members to participate in one of its financial inclusion awareness raising sessions, so that they, in turn, could provide greater support to local constituents.

FIT was a Conwy and Denbighshire Local Service Board project funded and supported by the European Social Fund through the Welsh Government. The project aimed to tackle poverty by developing, co-ordinating and promoting financial inclusion services within Local Service Board (LSB) organisations across Conwy and Denbighshire.

The Financial Inclusion Together Project Manager gave a presentation of the Project for member's information.

The FIT Project aimed to ensure everyone had the opportunity to access the financial advice, services and products needed to participate fully in society.

The Welsh Government had identified the following five key themes:

- Access to mainstream financial services
- Financial capability (including digital inclusion)
- Accessible financial and debt advice
- Income maximisation (including energy efficiency)
- Access to affordable credit and loans

One key objective of the Project had been to provide at least 1000 front line workers in LSB partner organisations with the financial inclusion knowledge and resources necessary to empower people they have contact with to be financially included.

To do this, the FIT Project would deliver awareness raising sessions to anyone working in the frontline who could assist in providing information on, or make quality referrals for, in-depth advice around financial inclusion.

The Project would build a legacy of actions within LSB partner organisations that would aim to embed financial inclusion practice once the Project ended in December 2014.

This preventative Project aimed to tackle poverty in the community by helping frontline staff to assist people to better manage in a challenging economic climate.

Two Awareness Raising sessions had been set up specifically for Councillors of two hours per session:

- Thursday, 19 June, 2014 – Rhyl; and
- Tuesday, 14 October, 2014 – Ruthin

Detailed discussion took place with the following issues discussed:

- The FIT Project worked closely with the Credit Unions. Exortionate interest rates payable to Pay Day Loan Companies would be flagged up to people to ensure they were aware of the high repayments required.

- Evaluations of the Project would be carried out by both external evaluators and also the Welsh Government.
- The Project were working with Llandrillo College to encourage staff and tutors to attend the sessions to enable advice to be passed on to the students. The Project were unable to provide direct advice to students.

The Project Manager confirmed she would distribute to all Councillors, a list of the Denbighshire County Council services who had assisted the Project. She would also inform all Councillors of the cost of each Awareness Raising Session following the meeting as she hadn't had this information to hand at the meeting.

The Chief Executive stated it would be essential to ascertain whether Denbighshire County Council were doing enough with schools to raise awareness of budgeting and savings etc.

RESOLVED that subject to the above, the report be noted.

At this juncture (11.15 a.m.) there was a 15 minute break

Meeting reconvened at 11.30 a.m.

8 WALES AUDIT OFFICE (WAO) ANNUAL IMPROVEMENT REPORT

Gwilym Bury from the Wales Audit Office (WAO) introduced the 2013/14 Annual Improvement Report (previously circulated) together with a presentation to provide information to Members.

Under the Local Government Measure, the Wales Audit Office annually reviewed the Council's progress towards meeting its objectives and its prospects for continuing to improve in the year ahead.

Overall, this had been a very positive report. The report had highlighted areas where further improvements could be made but there were no further recommendations within the report.

Gwilym Bury clarified that the report was in three main sections:

- Assessment of Council's 2012/13 performance;
- Council's arrangements for self-evaluation of 2012-13 performance;
- Council's arrangements for 2013/14 improvement planning.

In-depth discussion took place and the following issues were raised:

- The Council had helped many people from becoming homeless but its work to ensure access to affordable housing had been less effective. Performance in the previous two years had not reached the targets set. The percentage of affordable housing had been set by the county at 30% but the Planning Inspector reduced the amount to 10%. However, the Planning

Inspector had stated that if house prices increased by more than 10% from 2009, the Local Authority could request a higher percentage of new builds to be affordable housing;

- All the Denbighshire housing stock now met with the Welsh Housing Quality Standard;
- The condition of most “A” and “B” roads within Denbighshire had improved, but there had been little progress with “C” roads and 13.9% remained in a poor condition;
- The Council continued to improve the wellbeing of its most vulnerable citizens. CSSIW highlighted positive changes across both adult and children’s services, which had been extremely positive. The one area of concern had been the service for Looked After Children. Health assessments and dental checks were one of the lowest in Wales but this had been acknowledged as an area for improvement.
- The Council worked effectively with its business partners to deliver initiatives that supported the local economy. It also made progress in developing sustainable plans for funding future projects following the unsuccessful bid for Welsh Government funding from the Vibrant and Viable Places Fund to support initiatives within Rhyl.
- Pupils performance in secondary schools in 2013 had been mixed. At Key Stage 3, the proportion of 14 year old pupils achieving the core subject indicator, as measured by teacher assessment, had been below the Wales average in four of the previous five years. The issue of Key Stage 3 Education was one which the Chief Executive and members requested it be known that they did not agree on. It had been agreed, however, that further progress had been required in Key Stage 3.
- The Council had worked effectively to keep Denbighshire’s environment attractive, but further work had been required to reduce incidents of fly-tipping and to improve resident satisfaction. Positive moves had been taking place to improve these issues.
- Efficiencies had been delivered in modernising services but there had been a lack of progress by the Corporate Human Resources service in meeting its key internal targets during 2012/2013. Staff surveys indicated that morale amongst the Corporate HR Service was low. A recent internal audit report indicated that progress was being made in addressing key areas for improvement.
- The Council had taken steps to assess its provision in Welsh by means of a mystery shopper exercise. The Council would need to invest more in Welsh language training and for it to be planned effectively.

For the year 2013/14 the WAO concluded that:

- Denbighshire made good progress in delivering improvements in all its priority objectives for 2012/13 but further improvements were required in a few key areas;
- The Council’s service challenge reviews and other measures to self-evaluate its performance were robust;
- The Council’s planning for improvement and its arrangements to support improvement were good;

- The Council was likely to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement for 2014/15.

The Leader, Councillor Hugh Evans, thanked the WAO representative for the report. Thanks were also extended as the WAO representative had attended a majority of the Service Challenges and his advice had been extremely useful.

The Leader expressed concern regarding funding arrangements to Local Government and requested a response from the Auditor General regarding those arrangements, especially as the budget funding would have a massive impact on Local Government.

The WAO representative agreed to take the issue back to the Auditor General, as it would be a serious issue for a majority of Councils.

The Chief Executive thanked the WAO representative for the fair and balanced report. Again, thanks were extended for the support of the WAO representatives to the Council.

RESOLVED that subject to the above, the Council noted and accepted the Annual Improvement Report by the Welsh Audit Office.

9 LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION POLICY

The Lead Member for Modernising & Performance, Councillor Barbara Smith, presented the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) Report (previously circulated) for Full Council to adopt the Local Government Pension Scheme Discretion Policy.

The new regulations required all scheme employers to review their existing discretionary pension policy statements and publish new statements effective from 1 April 2014. It had been a requirement that the Discretion Policy Statement be agreed and published by 1 July 2014.

The main changes to the LGPS from April 2014 had been included in the report.

The changes to the LGPS had recently been presented at the Local Joint Consultative Committee, at which, the resolution had been to recommend to Full Council for adoption.

Following a brief discussion, it was:

RESOLVED that the discretions detailed in the report and policy be adopted by Full Council.

At this juncture, the Chair informed members of the pending retirement of the Head of Strategic Human Resources, Linda Atkin. Gratitude was extended to Linda for her hard work carried out on behalf of Denbighshire County Council and Good Luck in her retirement.

10 COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS AND POLITICAL BALANCE

The Democratic Services Manager presented a report (previously circulated) for Full Council to appoint the Chair and ten other members to the Democratic Services Committee for 2014/2015. Also detailing changes to the membership of the Council's Committees.

Section 11 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, required the Council to appoint the Chair and members of the Democratic Services Committee. There were to be no co-opted members. Under the Measure, there could be no more than one member of the Cabinet on the Committee (who could not be the Leader).

At the Council meeting in May 2012, it had been agreed that the membership would not include members of the Cabinet.

Councillor Barry Mellor was nominated as Chair, which was moved and seconded. It was agreed that the existing membership remain.

RESOLVED that the Council appoint the Chair, Councillor Barry Mellor, and ten other members to the Democratic Services Committee for 2014/2015.

11 COUNTY COUNCIL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Legal & Democratic Services introduced the Council's Forward Work Programme (previously circulated).

The dates for the forthcoming Budget Workshops were highlighted and members were urged to attend.

RESOLVED that subject to the above, the Council Forward Work Programme be approved and noted.

THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 1.30 P.M.