

COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the County Council held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin LL15 1YN on Tuesday, 8 September 2015 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Ian Armstrong, Brian Blakeley, Joan Butterfield, Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones, Bill Cowie, Meirick Davies, Richard Davies, Hugh Evans, Bobby Feeley, Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Martyn Holland, Rhys Hughes, Hugh Irving, Alice Jones, Huw Jones, Gwyneth Kensler (Chair), Geraint Lloyd-Williams, Jason McLellan, Barry Mellor, Bob Murray, Peter Owen, Dewi Owens, Merfyn Parry, Paul Penlington, Arwel Roberts, Anton Sampson, Gareth Sandilands, David Simmons, Barbara Smith, Julian Thompson-Hill, Joe Welch, Cefyn Williams, Eryl Williams and Huw Williams

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (MM), Corporate Director: Communities (NS), Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services (GW), Strategic Planning Team Manager (LG), Older People's Strategy Development Officer (SJ) and Committee Administrator (SLW)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Raymond Bartley, Ann Davies, Stuart Davies, Peter Duffy, Peter Evans, Carys Guy, Colin Hughes, Pat Jones, Win Mullen-James, Pete Prendergast, David Smith, Bill Tasker and Cheryl Williams

The Chair welcomed all members and officers to the meeting especially Councillor Anton Sampson who was attending his first full Council meeting following his election as County Councillor.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Declarations of Interest.

At this juncture, the Chair offered congratulations to Councillor Arwel Roberts who had raised over £1000 in memory of Hywyn Williams for the charity Clic Sargent.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

The Leader, Councillor Hugh Evans presented an urgent item relating to a statement for approval by Council:

"The tragedy of the Syrian refugee crisis has touched all of us. Denbighshire County Council is keen to join with the Welsh and UK Governments and others to coordinate an approach to fulfil our responsibility and play our part in providing assistance and humanitarian support to those refugees displaced as a result of the

war in Syria. This could include accommodating a number of families, with appropriate Government support”.

Discussion took place during which, more details were requested. It was agreed that there were no details at this early stage, but it would be important to show Denbighshire’s intention when the time arose and it would be made clear Denbighshire would expect the appropriate Government support.

There was a cross party consensus of agreement to the statement.

Proposed by the Leader, Councillor Hugh Evans and seconded by Councillor Arwel Roberts.

A vote took place which resulted in a unanimous agreement of the statement.

RESOLVED that Council unanimously agreed the proposed statement, supporting the proposal of aid and assistance within Denbighshire for the refugees with the appropriate Government support.

4 CHAIRMAN’S DIARY

A list of civic engagements undertaken by the Chair and Vice-Chair for the period 1 July 2015 to 27 July 2015 had been circulated prior to the meeting.

RESOLVED that the list of civic engagements undertaken by the Chair and Vice-chair be received.

5 MINUTES

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 7 July 2015 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

6 WALES AUDIT OFFICE (WAO) ANNUAL IMPROVEMENT REPORT

The Lead Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill, introduced the Wales Audit Office (WAO) Annual Improvement Report (previously circulated) to inform Council of the WAO’s conclusion and improvement proposals, and to secure Council endorsement of a response to the Report.

Under the Local Government Measure, the Wales Audit Officer 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 highlighted two areas of improvements but there were no further recommendations within the report. The two areas of improvement proposed were as follows:

- (a) Ensure that roles and responsibilities are clear for the achievement of the new affordable housing objective.
- (b) Review its working practices against the recommendations in the Auditor General's 2014-2015 Local Government National Reports, and implement improvements as necessary. Local Government National Reports covered areas such as Scrutiny, young people classed as NEET, and Environmental Health Services.

The representative from the WAO, Gwilym Bury, confirmed that no recommendations had been put forward in the report with only two Improvement Proposals.

Findings were that:

- the use of performance standards continued to promote a consistent culture of ambition across the Council's services
- overall, the performance of the social care department was strong but the introduction of new models of working for both children's and adult services would need rigorous evaluation throughout the forthcoming year
- limited progress had been made in addressing the underperformance in the provision of affordable housing, but the Council had helped prevent many people from becoming homeless
- the Council had improved the performance of its Human Resource service
- the progress of initiatives to support the Denbighshire economy had been inconsistent, but improved arrangements were likely to support the Council's ambitions
- The Council had made good progress in committing its Discretionary Housing Payments and improvements in monitoring since April 2015 would assist clarification of their impact
- Further progress had been made to improve the Welsh language capability of Council staff.

The Council had good financial management arrangements with no immediate shortcomings. Also, the Council's risk management arrangements were robust and fit for purpose and produced well informed balanced evaluations of its performance.

Indepth discussion took place and the following issues were raised:

- Councillor Meirick Lloyd Davies requested a copy of the Annual Improvement Report 2014/15 in Welsh and this was provided with apologies that it had not been published with the Council report pack.
- A number of members raised the issue of Affordable Housing. Gwilym Bury of the WAO explained that housing prices within Denbighshire had not increased by 10% to enable the affordable housing number to be revisited. The number of new builds within the county had been low compared to the remainder of Wales. Therefore, it would be challenging for the future but there would be a potential for Housing Associations to build more homes and for the Local Authority to take advantage of the housing reform subsidy.
- The process of bringing empty houses back into use had not been included within the Affordable Housing figures. Even though Denbighshire had

worked well on the project the affordable housing figures only incorporated new builds

- Improvement proposal of young people not in education, employment for training (NEETs) had been queried by Councillors. It was clarified that the proposal had been given to all Local Authorities for improvement. There would be a formal structure for response to the improvement proposals. An exercise had also taken place to assess previous reports and to gather information from service challenges. The Lead Member for Education clarified that Ann Jones A.M. would be sending a response regarding the issue
- The Leader, Councillor Hugh Evans, expressed his gratitude to the WAO representative for a positive report. Even though Denbighshire were seen to be a high performing Council, it had been stressed that they should not become complacent. It would prove difficult within the current climate but expectation from the Welsh Government and the WAO would be the same with less resources. It was requested that this be taken into consideration in the future.

Proposed by Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill, seconded by Councillor Barbara Smith.

Vote took place by a show of hands – unanimously in favour of recommendation.

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

7 AGEING WELL IN DENBIGHSHIRE

The Lead Member for Social Care, Adult and Children's Services, Councillor Bobby Feeley, introduced the Ageing Well in Denbighshire report (previously circulated) to inform Council of Denbighshire's Ageing Well Plan and to secure Council's endorsement of the Plan.

Denbighshire's Ageing Well Plan set out how the five priority themes of the Ageing Well in Wales programme would be delivered in Denbighshire. The five themes were:

- (i) Age Friendly Communities
- (ii) Dementia Supportive Communities
- (iii) Falls Prevention
- (iv) Opportunities for Employment, Learning and New Skills, and
- (v) Loneliness and Isolation.

In common with other Local Authority areas, the population of Denbighshire was ageing and this had major implications for all services, particularly Health and Social Care services. A Strategy had been produced for Supporting Independence in Denbighshire (SID) and the Ageing Well Plan was a key part of the Strategy.

Both SID and the Ageing Well Plan required a major focus on early intervention and prevention and those are also key themes of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act, which would be in force from April 2016.

There had been a recognition to move away from the traditional way of providing services, which had created an over reliance on statutory services.

Each Local Authority in Wales would be required to develop an Ageing Well Plan which had to be submitted to the Welsh Government and the Commissioner for Older People in Wales by October 2015. The Commissioner intended to monitor the implementation of all local plans and provide an independent report on the local (and national) achievements against outcomes. This had to be delivered, as a high profile requirement, as effectively as possible with the support of key partners.

Discussion took place and the following issues were raised:

- Agreement was shown to the Plan but concerns were raised that the Plan required sufficient resources together with appropriate staff to implement the Plan.
- Falls Prevention – it was stated that an elderly person could fall in various places due to a variety of factors. It was, therefore, imperative a range of measures were in place to prevent falls and assisted older people to live longer in their own homes and remain active in the community.
- Loneliness and Isolation – this had been shown to have a significant impact on health and wellbeing. There would be a need to work at all levels in identifying and tackling the root causes. Loneliness and isolation not only affected the elderly but was an intergeneration issue. The use of Day Centres as a way of preventing loneliness for elderly people was praised.
- Pilot schemes were taking place in Prestatyn, Corwen and Bodelwyddan. The pilot schemes were to provide a range of services and information for residents to easily access. Work would continue across both adult and children's services.
- Day Care provision, together with alternative options would be provided. The Local Authority were communicating with residents as to their requirements. Alternative providers were being sought who could offer a wider range of activities during the day for residents. The concept would be to bring it to a community hub and bring it to more people and different age groups.

Vote took place:

In Favour – 29

Abstain – 1

Against – 0

RESOLVED that the Council approve and endorse the Denbighshire's Ageing Well Plan.

8 NOTICE OF MOTION

Councillor Paul Penlington put forward the following Notice of Motion for the consideration of Full Council:

“This Council believes that Fracking (hydraulic fracturing to access shale gas) and UCG (underground coal gasification) are unacceptably invasive industries that irreparably damage the natural environment at both local and regional levels.

We believe there are significant adverse impacts from both Fracking and UCG which include water table contamination, air pollution and the large scale production of contaminated waste.

Therefore, we are opposed to any exploration or developments of these industries within our county and are highly concerned by the impact upon us of developments across the region”.

Following an in-depth debate, an amendment to the Notice of Motion was put forward by Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill which was as follows:

“This Council has concerns over Fracking (hydraulic fracturing) and other alternative technologies for unconventional gas production, and would support the current Welsh Government moratorium on not proceeding with any form of development in this county or the wider region until such time as proper evidence has been accumulated on the long term effects of these new technologies, and recognise the need to consider all options for energy production taking into account the depletion of fossil fuels”.

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill proposed the amendment, seconded by Councillor Martyn Holland.

A vote took place:

In favour – 16

Abstain – 0

Against – 16

As the vote was tied, the Chair had the casting vote. The Chair, Councillor Gwyneth Kensler, voted in favour of the amendment to the Notice of Motion.

RESOLVED that the Amended Notice of Motion be approved.

9 NOTICE OF MOTION

Lead Member for Social Care and Children’s Service, Councillor Bobby Feeley, put forward the following Notice of Motion for the consideration of Full Council:

1. “Acknowledges and supports the good work undertaken by Denbighshire in providing a range of accommodation and or support services to vulnerable people to help them maintain or regain their place in the community in Denbighshire.
2. Supports the continuance of the Supporting People preventative programme funded by the Welsh Government to assist and support potentially vulnerable and marginalised people to live independently and with dignity in their community through housing related support and advice services.

3. Calls on the Welsh Government to safeguard and not to impose any further reduction to the Supporting People grant.
4. Supports the joint campaign of Cymorth Cymru charity and Community Housing Cymru “Let’s Keep on Supporting People” to safeguard the supporting people programme grant budget.
5. To invite all Members of the North Wales Regional Collaborative Committee (NWRCC) in their own areas and organisations to support this motion.
6. To invite Constituency and Regional Members of the Welsh Assembly to support this motion.

Councillor Bobby Feeley proposed the Notice of Motion, seconded by Councillor Eryl Williams.

Vote took place:

In favour – 30

Abstain – 0

Against – 0

RESOLVED that the Notice of Motion be approved.

10 COUNTY COUNCIL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services introduced the Council’s Forward Work Programme (previously circulated).

RESOLVED that the Council Forward Work Programme be approved and noted.

The meeting concluded at 12.05 p.m.