

COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the County Council held in via VIDEO CONFERENCE on Tuesday, 7 September 2021 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Joan Butterfield, Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones, Ellie Chard, Ann Davies, Gareth Davies, Meirick Davies, Hugh Evans, Peter Evans, Bobby Feeley, Rachel Flynn, Tony Flynn, Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Martyn Holland, Alan Hughes, Hugh Irving, Brian Jones, Pat Jones, Tina Jones, Gwyneth Kensler, Richard Mainon, Christine Marston (Vice-Chair), Barry Mellor, Melvyn Mile, Bob Murray, Merfyn Parry, Paul Penlington, Pete Prendergast, Arwel Roberts, Peter Scott, Glenn Swingler, Andrew Thomas, Rhys Thomas, Tony Thomas, Julian Thompson-Hill, Graham Timms, Joe Welch, David Williams, Eryl Williams, Emrys Wynne and Mark Young

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (GB), Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services (GW), Democratic Services Manager (SP), Webcast zoom host (KJ), and Committee Administrator (SLW).

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brian Blakeley, Alan James, Geraint Lloyd-Williams, Anton Sampson, Cheryl Williams and Huw Williams

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters.

QUESTION PUT FORWARD BY COUNCILLOR PAUL PENLINGTON –

“Following the UK withdrawal from Afghanistan can you tell us how many of the subsequent individual refugees we are definitely taking in Denbighshire and when will they arrive”

Response by Councillor Bobby Feeley, Lead Member for Wellbeing and Independence – “our thoughts with all those affected by recent tragic events in Afghanistan including all those living here, veterans, interpreters and other refugees concerned about family members back home.

We have all watched in horror as events over the last few months have unfolded in Afghanistan causing so much immense uncertainty for its people.

I can confirm that Cabinet members discussed this situation regarding refugees from Afghanistan yesterday and have agreed that Denbighshire should increase our current commitments through the Global Resettlement Scheme to ten families. This will enable us to offer housing and support to five Afghan families at this time, although this could well be extended if the situation and the scheme continues past the first year. This is in addition to the existing commitment to support five families per year under the existing Syrian and Universal Refugee Programme agreed a few years ago.

One Afghan family has already been accepted and settled in Denbighshire over the last two weeks.

Accommodation is currently being sourced across the county, initially in the private rented sector in line with the current refugee programme and we have a number of offers already ranging from single rooms to a 5 bedroom house. Whilst we welcome offers of accommodation, it will not always be possible to make use of them due to the makeup of the individual families.

Unfortunately, Denbighshire are not able to receive offers of furniture, clothes, toys etc., but are working alongside other organisations who will try and find effective ways to use these thoughtful offers of help.

The Home Office have announced a one year funding programme for the Afghanistan scheme to enable Local Authorities to provide support for education and employment. In addition, they have indicated an ongoing commitment to support housing costs. The funding is similar to that received by the Council for the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme and members will be aware that we have used this very successfully supporting 22 families over the past five years into suitable housing and education with three individuals now in work and one undertaking their HGV licence. These have been supported by a dedicated Mentor in working Denbighshire funded by the scheme.

Cabinet members are pleased to be supporting Afghan families in line with the desire for Wales to be seen as a nation of sanctuary to ensure the families can integrate within the Welsh communities from day one of arrival.

We will do everything we can to put in place appropriate housing and a warm welcome so that our new neighbours will become important parts of our community as many have done before.

Given the housing situation, this will, indeed, be a difficult task but one we have every intention of fulfilling.

Each Local Authority across Wales is playing its part in supporting the Afghan programme and whilst this commitment is in relation to Denbighshire, we are working regionally and at a strategic level to share knowledge and support as and when appropriate.”

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Full Council held on 6 July 2021 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of Full Council held on 6 July 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

The minutes of the Special Council held on 22 July 2021 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Special Council held on 22 July 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

5 DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY

The Leader, Councillor Hugh Evans, introduced the Diversity in Democracy report (previously circulated) to bring to the attention of members the WLGA's Diversity and Democracy Programme and the actions approved by the WLGA Council, together with a request for all Welsh Councils to commit to becoming 'Diverse Councils'.

The WLGA had an ambitious Diversity and Democracy Programme to try and ensure that council chambers were more representative of the communities they serve. They had been considering ways in which greater diversity could be achieved following the local government elections in May 2022.

In September 2018 the WLGA Council agreed to take steps to advance gender equality and diversity in Councils before the 2022 elections. This was in recognition of the lack of diversity in Welsh Councils. A cross party working group was set up to explore broader underrepresentation in democracy. At a special meeting held in March of this year the WLGA Council received a report from that cross party working group with proposals designed to achieve a step change in diversity following the 2022 elections.

The WLGA Council agreed unanimously that a concerted and collective effort would be required across the local government family and political parties. As a result of that meeting, a letter had been sent to each local authority in Wales, signed by each of the leaders of the political groups represented on the WLGA Council. A copy of that letter had been attached as Appendix 2 to the report previously circulated.

Commitment was sought to the following declaration:

This Council commits to being a Diverse Council.

We agree to:

- Provide a clear public commitment to improving diversity in democracy
- Demonstrate an open and welcoming culture to all, promoting the highest standards of behaviour and conduct

- Set out a local Diverse Council Action Plan ahead of the 2022 local elections
Demonstrate a commitment to a duty of care for Councillors
- Provide flexibility in council business by reviewing our practical arrangements for the holding of meetings
- Ensure that all members are aware of the allowances and salaries to which they are entitled, particularly any reimbursement for costs of care, so that all members receive fair remuneration for their work and that the role of member is not limited to those who can afford it.

If the declaration was to be endorsed a more detailed report would be presented to the Democratic Services Committee to develop a Diverse Council Action Plan ahead of the 2022 local government elections.

During discussions, the following points were raised:

- Councillor Tony Thomas raised the issue that in the past upon his nomination to be a Councillor he had to resign from his post as a teacher. The Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services confirmed that the WLGA had been looking into that aspect of the nomination process.
- Councillor Bobby Feeley raised the gender balance of Denbighshire County Council. 14 of the Councillors were female, 1 member of Cabinet was female and only one Chair of various Committees were female. This did require a cultural change as, in her opinion, a lot of women did not see themselves in politics. With regards to older councillors, they did bring a lot of experience to the role so a diverse council would be more appropriate.
- It was stated that due to covid, meetings had been taking place remotely. Remote meetings would give more people an opportunity to stand, as would not take up time travelling to and from meeting venues. This was especially beneficial if a working person wished to stand as a councillor in the future.
- The issue of abuse to councillors from members of the public, especially female councillors was raised. This would not be tolerated and hoped this would not deter people from putting themselves forward to stand as a councillor in the future.
- It was confirmed that a key part of the declaration would be to encourage an extremely high standard of conduct from councillors.
- The diversity of the council was to encourage prospective candidates regarding of gender, age, race, ethnicity, disability etc., to stand as councillors.
- Roadshows were to be held in various areas to enable as much information as possible to be passed on to members of the public who would be interested in standing as a prospective candidate in the future.

Proposed by Councillor Mark Young and seconded by Councillor Bobby Feeley to accept the report.

A vote took place and it was unanimously agreed to accept the report.

RESOLVED that :

- (i) Council notes the content and actions outlined within the WLGA Council report and letter contained in Appendices 1 and 2.
- (ii) Council commits to being a 'Diverse Council' and supports the principles set out in the draft declaration in Appendix 3.
- (iii) the Democratic Services Committee is tasked with developing a Diverse Council Action Plan ahead of the 2022 local government elections.

6 NOTICE OF MOTION

Councillor Tony Thomas put forward the following Notice of Motion on behalf of the Welsh Conservative Group for consideration by Full Council:

"That Denbighshire County Council appoint a Young Persons Champion covering all ages up to 18."

During in-depth discussion, it was requested what the role of a Young Persons Champion would be. It was suggested that the role of the Young Persons Champion be referred to Democratic Services Committee to define the role and then a further report be submitted to Full Council at a future date.

Councillor Tony Thomas proposed the amendment that the Notice of Motion be submitted to Democratic Services Committee to define the role and a further report be submitted to Full Council, seconded by Councillor Martyn Holland.

A vote took place and a majority of members voted in favour with one member voting against the amendment.

RESOLVED that a report on the role of a Young Persons Champion be presented to Democratic Services Committee to define the role and a further report to be presented to Full Council.

7 COUNTY COUNCIL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services introduced the Councils forward work programme, together with the Council Briefing forward work programme (previously circulated).

- Real Living Wage Workshop to be held the following week
- Workshop to be arranged prior to the end of September 2021 regarding the current consultation by Welsh Government on Statutory Guidance for Corporate Joint Committees. The date of the workshop to be confirmed.

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

THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 11.36 A.M.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brian Blakeley, Alan James, Geraint Lloyd-Williams, Anton Sampson, Cheryl Williams and Huw Williams