

## **COUNTY COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the County Council held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin and by video conference on Tuesday, 31 January 2023 at 10.00 am.

### **PRESENT**

Councillors Michelle Blakeley-Walker, Joan Butterfield, Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones, Ellie Chard, Kelly Clewett, Ann Davies, Karen Edwards, Pauline Edwards, Gwyneth Ellis, James Elson, Hugh Evans, Justine Evans, Bobby Feeley, Gill German, Jon Harland, Elen Heaton, Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Martyn Hogg, Carol Holliday, Alan Hughes, Hugh Irving, Alan James, Delyth Jones, Paul Keddie, Diane King, Geraint Lloyd-Williams, Julie Matthews, Jason McLellan, Barry Mellor, Terry Mendies, Win Mullen-James, Merfyn Parry, Pete Prendergast (Vice-Chair), Arwel Roberts (Chair), Gareth Sandilands, Peter Scott, Rhys Thomas, Andrea Tomlin, Cheryl Williams, David Williams, Elfed Williams, Huw Williams, Emrys Wynne and Mark Young

### **ALSO PRESENT**

Chief Executive (GB); Corporate Director: Governance and Business (GW); Corporate Director: Communities (NS); Corporate Director: Economy and Environment (TW); Head of Finance and Property (SG); Democratic Services Manager (SP); Webcaster and Zoom Host (RTJ) and Committee Administrator (SLW)

#### **1 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Chris Evans and Raj Metri

#### **2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

#### **3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR**

No urgent matters.

At this juncture, the Chair and members offered condolences to Councillor Chris Evans on the loss of his mother recently.

Condolences were offered to the First Minister, Mark Drakeford on the sudden loss of his wife, Clare Drakeford.

Condolences were also offered to the family of the former Councillor Alice Jones. The Chair and Group Leaders paid tribute to the late Alice Jones for all her work for the Council and other Groups.

The Chair stated he had attended Ysgol Tir Morfa on Monday 30 January together with Councillor Barry Mellor. Pupils had been extremely interested in climate change and were grateful for the books provided by the Council and Councillor Mellor.

The judging of the Denbighshire Schools Art Competition “Beth Syn Eich Gwneud Chi'n Hapus” “What Makes You Happy”, had taken place on Monday 30 January, the results of which would be announced in due course. The Chair offered his gratitude to Sarah Dixon for all her hard work and also to all the children who had entered the competition.

#### **4 MINUTES**

The minutes of Full Council held on 6 December, 2022 were submitted.

***RESOLVED** that the minutes of Full Council held on 6 December 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.*

#### **5 BUDGET 2023/24 - FINAL PROPOSALS**

The Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets, Councillor Gwyneth Ellis, introduced the Budget 2023/24 – Final Proposals Report (previously circulated).

The report set out the implications of the Local Government Settlement 2023/24 and proposals to finalise the budget for 2023/24.

The Council was legally required to set a balanced and deliverable budget before the start of each financial year and to set the resulting level of Council Tax to allow bills to be sent to residents.

An overview of the budget process was provided and the impact of the Local Government Settlement. Approval of the budget 2023/24 was sought including the level of Council Tax.

The Draft Local Government Settlement for 2023/24 had been received by the council on 14<sup>th</sup> December which had resulted in a positive settlement of 8.2%, compared to the Welsh average of 7.9%. The Final Settlement was expected in early March but Welsh Government had indicated there should be few changes.

The draft settlement included a slightly increased indicative average settlement increase of 3.0% for 2024/25. Although the increase had be welcomes, difficult decisions would be required over the coming years.

The final proposals to balance the 2023/24 budget were shown in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) in Appendix 1 to the report.

The pressures identified within the final proposals amounted to £25.116m. A draft settlement of around 14.5% would have been required in order to fund all the

pressures. The net +8.2% settlement generated £14.231m additional revenue leaving a funding gap of £10.885m.

The following were included in the proposals to bridge the funding gap –

- Savings in the Capital Financing Budget amounted to £1.067m.
- Corporate contingencies relating to the unused element of the covid contingency put aside as part of the previous year's budget process amounted to £1.200m.
- The impact of the triennial actuarial review of the Clwyd Pension Fund meant that the Council had a small surplus rather than a significant deficit which resulted in a saving of £3.828m.
- The savings from bringing the Revenues and Benefits Service back in house had been confirmed and a further £300k could be released.
- Services had been asked to identify 1% savings/efficiencies which identified £961k of savings (included in full in Appendix 3 of the report).
- Fees and Charges Income Budgets had been inflated in line with agreed Fees and Charges Policy which increased external income by £423k
- Savings involving some element of service change amounted to £371k.
- Technical budget reductions which had no impact on service delivery amounted to £167k
- Schools had also been asked to plan for 1% efficiencies which amounted to £816k.
- It was recommended that Council Tax increased by 3.8% which, along with minor changes to the Council Tax Base, would generate £2.713m additional revenue. This level was at the lower end of indicative increases across Wales. It was also lower than the average of 4.35% over the last four years.

Following discussions members thanked the Lead Member and Officers for all their work in providing a balanced budget which had been a difficult process.

Councillor Gwyneth Ellis proposed the approval of the Budget report, seconded by Councillor Barry Mellor.

Following a vote, the results were –

Approval of the Budget Report – 38

Abstain – 1

Against – 3

Therefore, it was

**RESOLVED** that Full Council:

- *Note the impact of the Draft Local Government Settlement 2023/24*
- *Supports the proposals outlined in Appendix 1, and detailed in Section 4, and finalise the budget for 2023/24*
- *Approve the average Council Tax rise of 3.8% proposed*
- *Delegate authority to the Head of Finance and Property in consultation with the Lead Member for Finance to adjust the use of cash included in the budget proposals by up to £500k if there is movement between the draft and*

*final settlement figures in order to allow the setting of Council Tax in a timely manner.*

**AT THIS JUNCTURE (11.20 A.M.) THERE WAS A 15 MINUTE BREAK.  
THE MEETING RECONVENED AT 11.35 A.M.**

## **6 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2023/24**

The Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets, Councillor Gwyneth Ellis, introduced the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/24 Report (previously circulated).

During discussions it was confirmed that under 4.3 of the report, this would include refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine.

Councillor Gwyneth Ellis proposed to accept the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/24, seconded by Councillor Mark Young.

Following a vote, the results were –

Approval of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/2024 – 40

Abstain – 0

Against – 0

Therefore, it was

**RESOLVED** that –

- *Members adopt the Council Tax Reduction Schemes and Prescribed Requirements (Wales) Regulations 2013 and the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements and Default Scheme)(Wales)(Amendment) Regulations 2023 in respect of the 2023/24 financial year.*
- *Members approve the discretionary elements of the scheme shown in section 4.4, for 2023/2024 financial year.*

## **7 SURVEY OF MEMBERS ON THE TIMING OF MEETINGS**

The Lead Member for Corporate Strategy, Policy and Equalities, Councillor Julie Matthews, introduced the Survey of Members on the Timings of Meetings Report (previously circulated).

The report outlined statutory requirements under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 in respect of surveying elected members on the timing of Council meetings. A survey of elected members had taken place during December 2022 and January 2023.

At the time of writing the report 34 responses (72% of the membership) had been received. The results of the survey were attached in Appendix 2 and summarised herewith –

- The majority of members preferred morning meetings.

- The majority of members did not want to see the timings of meetings rotated.
- Members cited evening meetings as being the most difficult for them to attend.

The Council held many of its meetings as hybrid meetings. Hybrid meetings developed from the virtual meetings introduced as a necessity during the COVID-19 pandemic and were subsequently made permanent for certain meetings under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

The Council's policy for holding meetings had been developed by a member working group and reviewed by the Democratic Services Committee prior to adoption by full Council in December 2021.

Members took the opportunity to thank the Democratic Services Manager and his team for their work they had undertaken on setting up the hybrid meetings.

Councillor Julie Matthews proposed the approval of the Survey of Members on the Timings of Meetings Report, seconded by Councillor Paul Keddie.

It was unanimously agreed by a show of hands to approve the report.

***RESOLVED*** that Members approve and confirm the arrangements for the timing of Council, Committee and other member meetings.

## **8 COUNTY COUNCIL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Corporate Director – Business and Governance, introduced the Council Forward Work Programme together with the Council Workshop Forward Work Programme (previously circulated).

The next Council meetings were scheduled to take place on 28 February and 9 May (Annual Council).

The next Council Workshop meeting was due to take place on 14 February.

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

**THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 12.10 P.M.**