

COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the County Council held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin LL15 1YN and via Video Conference on Tuesday, 27 February 2024 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, Chris Evans, 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, Brian Jones, Delyth Jones, Paul Keddie, Diane King (Vice-Chair), Geraint Lloyd-Williams, Julie Matthews, Jason McLellan, Barry Mellor, Terry Mendies, Raj Metri, Win Mullen-James, Merfyn Parry, Arwel Roberts, Gareth Sandilands, Peter Scott (Chair), Rhys Thomas, Andrea Tomlin, Cheryl Williams, Elfed Williams, Eryl Williams, Huw Williams, Emrys Wynne and Mark Young

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (GB); Corporate Director: Governance and Business (GW); Corporate Director: Economy and Environment (TW); Corporate Director: Communities (NS); Head of Finance (LT); Head of Corporate Services: Performance, Digital and Assets (HV-E); Principal Revenues, Benefits and Contract Manager (PB); Strategic Planning and Performance Team Leader (IMcG); Zoom Host (SR) and Committee Administrator (SLW)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors James May and David Williams

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

None.

At this juncture, the Chair, Councillor Peter Scott, apologised to Councillor Ann Davies for not mentioning at the January Council meeting congratulations on her being awarded the British Empire Medal.

Councillor Ann Davies thanked the Chair for his kind words and thanked the residents of Rhuddlan for their support over the years.

Councillor Terry Mendies apologies as at the last Council meeting he made an inaccurate statement concerning the Managing Director of Denbighshire Leisure Limited (DLL), Mr Jamie Groves. He stated he won an award when, in fact, he

received an award on behalf of the organisation of which he is Managing Director. Councillor Mendies recognised the use of the term “gongs” was inappropriate. He had stated that DLL had been given £2.3million by DCC, this again, was incorrect. Councillor Mendies apologised unreservedly to Mr Groves for making these statements and also wish to apologise to every member because on that day his demeanour may have seemed aggressive. That had not been his intention nor was it his intention to cause offence to any individuals. If he did so, he hoped those concerned would accept his sincere apologies.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of Full Council held on 30 January 2024 were submitted.

Matters Arising –

Councillor Mark Young raised issues about funding for education and having seen the letter from Headteachers and Governors expressed concern for parents on receiving such a letter. Councillor Young had been inundated by queries from parents and asked how to respond to parents. He also asked whether the Lead Member for Education would commit to meeting with himself and other Chairs of Governors?

The Lead Member for Education, Councillor Gill German, responded that Councils across the UK were facing financial pressures. With year on year cuts to council budgets over 14 years it aimed to deliver a balanced budget required by law. Everything had been done to minimise the impact on schools. The Lead Member confirmed she would be willing to speak to Chairs of Governors as would the Head of Education, Geraint Davies.

Page 7 – Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts also raised concerns regarding the letter which had been sent out to parents, together with 3% cuts, Queens Market and Band B schools. It was imperative vulnerable residents of the county were protected.

The Leader and Deputy Leader confirmed they would do their best to protect those vulnerable residents. They were angry with the cuts but this was an issue which was affecting all Local Authorities across the UK and not just Denbighshire. Schools managed their own budgets and DCC had protected services for most vulnerable in the community.

Funding was a complicated process and these were unprecedented times. The difficult process of protecting vulnerable residents and services had been a priority.

Councillor Andrea Tomlin – page 9 - requested an update on 140 applications for early exit scheme

The Monitoring Officer, Gary Williams explained the closing date was in January 2024 and each service were consulted as to whether financially the early exit scheme would be suitable for the service. A number of applicants would not be approved for early exit. Some who had been approved had accepted and others

were still in the process of considering the package. Once the final information was confirmed, it would be circulated to members.

The Chief Executive, Graham Boase, also confirmed that information would be available to members at Council Workshops.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the minutes of Full Council held on 30 January 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

5 COUNCIL TAX 24/25 AND ASSOCIATED MATTERS

The Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets, Gwyneth Ellis introduced the Council Tax 24/25 and Associated Matters report (previously circulated).

The Council at its meeting on 30 January 2024 set the budget for 2024/25 including the level of Council Tax. It was necessary for the Council to pass further resolutions in a particular form to ensure that the Council Tax and its associated matters were legally valid.

It was agreed council needed to increase council tax by 9.34% and would also include increase of 4.9% for Police and Crime Commissioner and 3.9% increase in the Town/Community Councils precept.

During discussions the following points were raised –

- Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts raised concern due to the fact that 17 members had voted against the budget and the fact that £3million savings had not been met. He asked for a guarantee the £3million shortfall would be found. The Lead Member, Councillor Gwyneth Ellis confirmed she was comfortable with the process. At this point, the Monitoring Officer clarified that the Council at the previous meeting, had set the budget and the purpose of this report was to set the council tax and associated matters.

The Council Tax 24/25 and Associated Matters report was proposed and seconded. A vote took place by a show of hands as follows –

For – 28

Against – 14

Abstain – 0

RESOLVED that –

- County Council as the Billing Authority, considered the precepts received from the Police & Crime Commissioner for North Wales and the Town/Community Councils and declare the Council Tax levels for the 2024/25 financial year*
- The amounts calculated by the Council for the 2024/25 financial year, in accordance with Sections 32 to 34 (1) of the Local Government Finance*

Act 1992 (the Act) and Alteration of Requisite Calculations (Wales) Regulations 2008 are as Appendix A section 3.

(iii) The amounts calculated by the Council for the 2024/25 financial year, in accordance with Sections 34 (2) to 36 (1) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (the Act) are as Appendix A section 4

(iv) The amounts of Council Tax for the 2024/25 financial year for each of the categories of dwellings be as shown in Appendix C

(v) The level of discount for Class A, B and C as prescribed under the Council Tax (Prescribed Class of Dwellings) (Wales) Regulations 2004 be set at zero for the financial year 2024/25 with the caveat that this is dependent on no changes to legislation or local conditions.

6 CAPITAL PLAN 2023/24 - 2026/27 AND RECOMMENDATION OF CAPITAL SCRUTINY GROUP

The Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets, Councillor Gwyneth Ellis, introduced the Capital Plan 2023/24 – 2026/27 and recommendations of Capital Scrutiny Group report (previously circulated).

The report updated Members with an updated Capital Plan and the Capital Strategic Report for 2024/25. The Capital Plan records all actual and forecast Council Fund (CF) capital expenditure and funding. The Capital Strategy provided a high level, concise and comprehensive overview to Members of how both CF and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of the Council's services.

The full Capital Plan was last reported to Council in February 2023, monthly updates were presented to Cabinet.

The Capital Scrutiny Group had reviewed capital bids and had made recommendations for inclusion in the Capital Plan from 2024/25 onwards. These were detailed in Appendix 3 and summarised in Appendix 4.

During discussions, the following points were raised –

- Rhyl Queens Market Redevelopment – it was confirmed that the Queens Market building had been handed over to the Council last week. More information would be circulated to Members in the near future.
- Sustainable Communities for Learning – Band B – it was confirmed that various projects were being worked through.
- Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts on behalf of the Independent Group requested a guarantee the next year would not be an overspend and the £3million savings would be made. The Chief Executive, Graham Boase responded that it was difficult to know what would happen in the future and a guarantee could not be given that there would not be an overspend next year. Heads of Service were working towards the target saving of £3.4million
- Condition of the highways within the county was an issue. There was less money for highways but were going back to a level previously maintained. Further discussions were to take place with members to keep them updated

on the progress of roads and if they had issues with any particular roads in their wards.

- Waste change project. 27 additional jobs had been created. The new project would cost less to run. The current waste model cost this year £7.6million, the new project would cost £7.1million meaning a saving of £500k per financial year.
- Cost to the Local Authority of the 20 mph speed limit. The cost of the 20 mph was covered by the Welsh Government.
- Other projects costing £6.8million, and it was confirmed that a list of the projects would be provided to Members.
- A written response was requested by Councillor Rhys Thomas to all members as it stated that the total budget for sustainable communities for learning Band B was £51.9 million and it had the breakdown of what Welsh Government and DCC were funding. When was the promise of £51.9 million or £36.1million made? I would like to know what would the sums be now, taking inflation into account? Councillor Thomas was concerned about what Denbighshire would have to spend in order to match fund. The Head of Finance informed Members that she would get a full response on the timing when those figures were and what the latest position was.

The Capital Plan 2023/24 – 2026/27 and Recommendation of Capital Scrutiny Group report was proposed and seconded. A vote took place by a show of hands as follows –

For – 27

Against – 12

Abstain – 0

RESOLVED that –

- Members noted the latest position on the current Capital Plan 2023/24 – 2026/27 included in Appendix 1 and the update on major projects included in Appendix 2*
- Members supported the Capital Scrutiny Group recommendation of capital bids for inclusion in the 2024/25 Capital Plan. These recommendations are detailed in Appendix 3 and summarised in Appendix 4*
- Members approved the 2024/25 Capital Plan included in Appendix 1*
- Members approved the Capital Strategy Report for 2024/25 as detailed in Appendix 5*

7 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT (TMSS) 2024/25 AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2024/25 TO 2026/27 (APPENDIX 1)

Councillor Gwyneth Ellis, Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets, introduced the Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) 2024/25 and Prudential Indicators 2024/25 to 2026/27 (Appendix 1) (previously circulated).

The report showed how the Council would manage its investments and its borrowing for the coming year and sets the policies within which the treasury management (TM) function operates.

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Code of Practice on Treasury Management (the "CIPFA TM Code") required the Council to approve the TMSS and Prudential Indicators annually. A decision was required therefore to approve the recommendations within the report.

The Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) 2024/25 and Prudential Indicators 2024/25 to 2026/27 (Appendix 1) report was proposed and seconded.

By a show of hands all Members were unanimously in favour of the report.

RESOLVED that –

- (i) Council approves the TMSS for 2024/25 (Appendix 1)
- (ii) Council approves the setting of Prudential Indicators for 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27 (Appendix 1 Annex A)
- (iii) Council approved the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement (Appendix 1 Section 6)
- (iv) Council confirms it has read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment (Appendix 2) as part of its consideration.

8 REVIEW OF CORPORATE PLAN OBJECTIVES

Lead Member for Corporate Strategy, Policy and Equalities, Councillor Julie Matthews, introduced the Review of Corporate Plan Objectives report (previously circulated) with a proposal to reduce the size of the Corporate Plan (Themes and Pledges) and how that could be achieved.

Following a review of the existing Well-being, Equality and improvement objectives, a decision was required on the revised Corporate Plan proposed within the report, which set the Council's continuing strategic vision for the remainder of the present term (2024 to 2027).

It was acknowledged that what the Council was being asked to consider was not what anyone wanted for the Corporate Plan, however this situation was not unusual or unique within Wales. In light of the significant financial challenge faced by the council, it was appropriate to take the opportunity to review what was important going forward and make appropriate course-corrections to support long-term sustainability.

The current size of the Corporate Plan created an administrative burden and drain on the management capacity across the organisation at a time when head-space and time was needed to address the pressing budget challenge.

The report was to recommend the reduction of the Corporate Plan by dispersing 3 Themes and de-escalating or amending 22 Pledges. However, it was stressed that the removal of pledges did not mean that things would stop. They would continue at Service Plan level for as long as resources would allow. The changes propose in the report were strictly about how things were reported.

The Review of Corporate Plan Objectives report was proposed and seconded.

By a show of hands, all members were unanimously in favour of the report.

RESOLVED that –

- (i) Council confirmed it has read, understood and taken account of the Wellbeing Impact Assessment (Appendix 4) as part of its consideration
- (ii) Members approved the revised Corporate Plan (appendix 1b) to enable the document to be published.

9 REVIEW OF THE COMPOSITION OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE RECRUITMENT PANEL

The Monitoring Officer, Gary Williams, introduced the Review of the Composition of the Standards Committee Recruitment Panel report (previously circulated).

The Standards Committee had recommended that a report be brought to Full Council to consider whether to reduce the number of elected Members on the Recruitment Panel to 2 (from 3) and replace the 1 elected Member with the Chair of Standards Committee.

There were no recommendations for the report but it was unanimously agreed to the change noted within the report.

10 NOTICE OF MOTION

Councillor Jon Harland put forward the following Notice of Motion –

“That this council, in light of the distressing events that have occurred in Israel and Palestine, commits to:

- (i) Explore how the Council can offer appropriate support to local residents of all faiths and none, who need our assistance as a result of these violent events
- (ii) Stand ready to provide support and open our arms to innocent people displaced and affected by these events.”

During discussions it was stated the Denbighshire County Council do have processes in place to assist refugees and have done previously, for example, from Syria and Ukraine.

The Notice of Motion was proposed by Councillor Jon Harland and seconded by Councillor Martyn Hogg.

A vote took place by a show of hands and Members were unanimously in agreement to the Notice of Motion.

RESOLVED that Members agree to the Notice of Motion.

11 NOTICE OF MOTION

Councillor Merfyn Parry put forward the following Notice of Motion –

“I propose a motion for Denbighshire County Council to suspend any further engagement with the proposed new North Wales National Park, especially financially, until there is a significant improvement in local and national funding.”

Lead Member, Councillor Win Mullen-James explained the costing of these works would be 75% from the Welsh Government and 25% from Local Authorities but the 25% could be grant funded by WG and only officer and member time would be required for evidence gathering. The Motion was premature. Councillor Mullen-James suggested a decision be deferred until after the workshops which are to take place. NRW were still evidence gathering and expected to publish their firm proposal which included a suggested boundary until Autumn of 2024 at the very earliest. To withdraw now would be premature.

Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts suggested an amendment as follows - Denbighshire County Council suspend any financial engagement with the proposed new North Wales National Park but should continue to be involved in consultative discussions until such time as there is a significant improvement in local and national funding.

The amendment was proposed by Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts and seconded by Councillor Eryl Williams.

A vote took place to agree the amendment and was unanimously approved. Therefore, the amendment would be put forward as the substantive Notice of Motion.

A vote took place by a show of hands on the amendment as the substantive Motion

For – 18

Against – 21

RESOLVED that the Notice of Motion was defeated.

12 COUNTY COUNCIL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Monitoring Officer, Gary Williams, introduced the Council's Forward Work Programme and the Council Workshop Forward Work Programme.

RESOLVED that the Council's Forward Work Programme and the Council Workshop Forward Work Programme be noted.

THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 12.25 P.M.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors James May and David Williams