

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, 14 May 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, Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Martyn Hogg, Carol Holliday, Alan Hughes, Hugh Irving, Alan James, Brian Jones, Delyth Jones, Diane King (Vice-Chair), Geraint Lloyd-Williams, Julie Matthews, James May, Jason McLellan, Barry Mellor, Terry Mendies, Merfyn Parry, Arwel Roberts, Gareth Sandilands, Peter Scott (Chair), Rhys Thomas, Andrea Tomlin, Cheryl Williams, Elfed Williams, Huw Williams, Emrys Wynne and Mark Young

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (GB); Corporate Director: Governance and Business (GW); Head of Corporate Support Service – People (CR); Pay and Reward Specialist (SV); Democratic Services Manager (SP); Zoom Host and Webcast (KE); and Committee Administrator (SLW)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Elen Heaton, Raj Metri, David Williams and Eryl Williams

Apologies for absence were also received from the Corporate Director: Environment and Economy, Tony Ward.

At this juncture, Councillor Diane King paid tribute to Councillor Win Mullen-James who sadly had recently passed away.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

3 APPOINTMENT OF THE CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL

Councillor Hugh Irving nominated Councillor Peter Scott to be Chair of the Council for the 2024-25 municipal year, seconded by Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts.

No further nominations were proposed, and the meeting indicated its affirmation to the appointment.

Councillor Scott declared his acceptance of the office of Chair and announced that his consorts would be his daughter and grand-daughter. His Chaplin would be Nigel Williams and his charity would be St. Kentigerns.

RESOLVED that Councillor Peter Scott be appointed Chair of Denbighshire County Council for the 2024-25 municipal year.

At this juncture, tributes were made by the Chair and all Group Leaders to the late Councillor Win Mullen-James who had recently passed away.

4 APPOINTMENT OF THE VICE-CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL

Councillor Gill German nominated Councillor Diane King to be Vice Chair of the Council for the 2024-25 municipal year, seconded by Councillor Joan Butterfield.

No further nominations were proposed, and the meeting indicated its affirmation to the appointment.

Councillor King declared her acceptance of the office of Vice Chair and announced that her consort would be her son Mark

RESOLVED that Councillor Diane King be appointed Vice Chair of Denbighshire County Council for the 2024-25 municipal year.

At this juncture, there was a one minute of silent reflection to pay respect to the late Councillor Win Mullen-James.

5 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters.

Question put forward to Annual Council by Mr Ataur-Raziq Gonzalez -

In Denbighshire County Council's Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027, revised in 2024, there is a section on Equality, Diversity and Human Rights which states;

"We are committed to celebrating diversity and promoting equality in everything we do"

And that you will *"engage, where appropriate, with groups that represent people with protected characteristics"*.

And, in the Wellbeing assessment section you state your Well-being Impact Assessments are designed to assess the likely impact of proposals on the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Denbighshire, Wales and the world.

Can you therefore tell me what Denbighshire County Council are actively doing to engage with minority groups and ensure their wellbeing needs are addressed within Denbighshire ensuring their views are represented and they are able to feel respected and valued by Denbighshire County Council?

The Leader, Councillor Jason McLellan, thanked Mr Gonzales for his question. He explained that the protocol in this matter was that the question would be answered by the Lead Member on Cabinet whose portfolio included the topic of the question and in this instance, the Lead Member was Councillor Julie Matthews who had prepared a detailed response.

Councillor Julie Matthews responded as follows –

We are committed to celebrating diversity and promoting equality in everything we do to improve the quality of life for everyone living, working and visiting Denbighshire. Our vision for the future of the Council was developed in partnership with local communities and partners. Our strategic aim is to be a high performing Council closer to the community.

As you state, Denbighshire County Council's Corporate Plan makes a strong commitment to equality and diversity. The Plan contains our equality and wellbeing objectives and these are reported throughout our quarterly reports. The next report will be an annual report to Council in July. The Plan is available on our website with our equality objectives clearly identified. Engaging and listening to the voices of people with protected characteristics, people experiencing socio economic disadvantage and seldom heard groups is always important to us and something we are always trying to improve. We also consider the impact on the aforementioned groups and consider opportunities to maximise equality through our wellbeing impact assessments or our integrated impact assessments.

Listed bodies like the council, must prepare and publish equality objectives every four years and must involve people who represent the interests of people who share one or more of the protected characteristics and have an interest in the way that the authority carries out its functions.

Our online engagement portal is used constantly to engage and consult on our proposals or what we call, our county conversations and we will soon be engaging to find out what people think of our updated engagement policy and public participation strategy. We canvas the views of everyone in the community and we identify specific stakeholders that may be affected by a proposal who are wellbeing impact assessments for example for any more detailed engagements.

This portal policy and public participation strategy guides the engagement work which is progressed across the council be it with traditionally hard to reach groups by education and children's services and adult social care and homelessness, within our housing and community service in terms of gypsy roma engagement. Within our planning public protection and countryside services with our targeted engagement around our local development plan and within our finance and audit service in terms of revenues and benefits. There is always a great deal of engagement activity going on.

As an example in terms of the development of the Corporate Plan we ran workshops and a survey, we reviewed the information all partners already held from engagements and consultations to avoid asking the same questions again and again. We explored statistics and research to understand how inequality looks

across the county and how it might persist, eg; in term of health outcomes, education or poverty. There is a great deal of further information published on the Public Services Board website too. Also via the Conwy and Denbighshire Public Services Board we held a regional interactive community voice forum for representatives of seldom heard groups. Over 50 organisations attended, additional workshops were offered to deaf and visually impaired forums.

Importantly, every year through our annual stakeholders survey most recently held between September 2023 and February 2024, we consult widely with representative stakeholders in our communities on the content and relevance of our Corporate Plan Objectives particularly around the issues of equality and fairness. The latest stakeholder survey results will be included in the July report to County Council.

Following the changes to the Corporate Plan earlier this year, we closed what was fairest safe and more equal Board and we enhanced the remit of the Strategic Equality and Diversity Group to include oversight of all equality and diversity matters. The Group takes a key role in agreeing the content of the statutory public sector equality duty and gender pay gap reports. It considers Denbighshire's position in relation to Welsh Governments various equality plans and considers and reviews the quality of Wellbeing Impact Assessments and more recently arranged for WLGA to provide equality and diversity training for members.

The message from engagement work carried out at local, regional and national levels is that we need to improve in terms of involving people in decisions which affect their lives and communities and work to reduce deprivation. We are already making progress in these areas particularly in relation to social care and community support services.

In our Corporate Plan we made a range of pledges to improve, for example, attainment, economic outcomes, housing, community cohesion etc., and we also made a pledge to strengthen our engagement with people with protected characteristics, those experiencing socio economic disadvantage and those who experience discrimination or disadvantage and this is included under what is theme 6 of a well run high performing council.

To this end, we have developed and the Strategic Equality and Diversity Group will be approving, the collation of a comprehensive list of organisations that support people with protected characteristics and those living with socio economic disadvantage in the county, including seldom heard groups.

Additional contacts have been imported to the list from resources including the North Wales Public Sector Equality Network, the Conwy and Denbighshire Community Safety Partnership, and DVSC. The list will be reviewed annually. Using the contact list will enable us to strengthen our engagement and communication work and ensuring more equal outcomes for people, including reducing inequalities associated with poverty. The list will be available from the communications and marketing team in the council, available on our Denbighshire County Council website and available to our partners in order to undertake equality engagements.

The well run high performing Board will also be evaluating its current workstreams to ensure we maximise our contribution to this pledge.

Supplementary question put forward by Mr Gonzalez –

I am a member of the community group called Prestatyn Voices for Peace and on 1 May this year, one of our members emailed the Leader direct asking if you would fly the Palestinian flag on 15 May which is Nakba Day. Nakba means catastrophe in Arabic which refers to the mass displacement and disposition of Palestinians in 1948.

Denbighshire County Council's Constitution says that you, as Leader of the Council have the authority to give instructions for flying flags at the council offices and lighting up of Denbighshire Leisure buildings on significant occasions.

My colleague received a response this morning from one of the council officers saying that you will not be flying the Palestinian flag as it was against the council's flag flying policy. However, this has been done before, in support of oppressed people in other parts of the world. You lit buildings up for black lives matter in 2020, in 2022 you flew the Ukrainian flag and lit up buildings, so I am asking you publicly today, as you say you are so committed to equality, will you demonstrate the equality authorise the flying of the Palestinian flag on Denbighshire's major buildings and light up Denbighshire Leisure buildings in the colours of the Palestinian flag as you have done for other oppressed people?

Response from Lead Member Councillor Julie Matthews –

Councillor Matthews thanked Mr Gonzalez for his supplementary question and stated a written response would be provided as soon as possible.

6 MINUTES

The minutes of Full Council held on 14 May, 2024 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of Full council held on 14 May 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

7 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2024/25

The Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets, Councillor Gwyneth Ellis, introduced the Pay Policy Statement 2024/25 (previously circulated) to seek approval of Full Council of the Pay Policy Statement which had been drafted in accordance with the requirements of 38 (1) of the Localism Act 2011. The Policy incorporated all existing pay arrangements for the workforce groups within the Council, including chief Officers and the lowest paid employees.

The Pay Policy had been updated with the current situation with regards to the national pay awards which had been agreed for 2023/24, but no agreement had been reached for 2024/25.

The Pay Policy had been updated with the current position with regards to the national position of the pay awards for Chief Officers and Chief Executive, which were yet to be agreed 2024/25.

During discussions, the following questions were raised –

- Over the past year, recruitment and retention had been a serious issue. Officers responded that during the drawing up of the Pay Policy, they had compared the salaries with other organisations. There were other policies in use and together with the Pay Policy assist with the recruitment and retention of staff. Pay did not always compare with the external sector but that was beyond the control of officers as abide by national pay awards. Officers confirmed they did not have concerns regarding recruitment and retention of staff.
- A number of staff leaving the local authority had been due to the voluntary exit scheme. It was confirmed that when members of a team left, the remaining members of staff would not be expected to take on the additional work. The safety and wellbeing of the remaining staff was paramount.
- It was confirmed that the Pay Policy had been included within the budget process.

The Pay Policy Statement 2024/25 was proposed and seconded. A vote took place by a show of hands and it was unanimously agreed to approve the Pay Policy Statement 2024/25.

RESOLVED that –

- Full Council accept the recommendation from the Senior Leadership Remuneration Panel and approve the Pay Policy for 2024/25*
- Council confirms it had read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment as part of its consideration.*

8 ANNUAL REVIEW OF POLITICAL BALANCE AND APPOINTMENT OF SCRUTINY CHAIRS

The Democratic Services Manager, Steve Price, introduced the Annual Review of Political Balance and Appointment of Scrutiny Chairs (previously circulated).

As the new municipal year commenced in May it was appropriate for Council to consider changes in political balance in accordance with statutory requirements.

Council was asked to appoint one county councillor to the vacant seat on Standards Committee following the standing down of Councillor Hugh Irving earlier in the year. The Committee would meet at least four times per year and the appointment was not made under political balance rules.

Councillor Martyn Hogg nominated Councillor Jon Harland, seconded by Councillor Gwyneth Ellis.

Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts nominated Councillor Andrea Tomlin, seconded by Councillor Karen Edwards.

A roll call vote took place with the result being as follows -

Councillor Jon Harland – 26

Councillor Andrea Tomlin – 16

Therefore, Councillor Jon Harland was appointed on to the Standards Committee.

RESOLVED that –

(i) Council notes the political balance arrangements for the allocation of committee seats, and

(ii) Council appoint Councillor Jon Harland to sit on the Standards Committee as a Denbighshire County Councillor.

9 GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Corporate Director: Governance and Business, Gary Williams, introduced the Governance and Audit Committee Terms of Reference (previously circulated).

The terms of reference of the committee had been reviewed at the request of the committee and in order that they were updated in accordance with CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) guidance.

During the review of the terms of reference, regard had been given to suggested terms of reference published by CIPFA, the terms of reference of neighbouring local authorities and statutory guidance issued by Welsh Government.

The proposed terms of reference had been drafted in consultation with the s151 officer, Chief Internal Auditor and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee. Comments and observations had also been taken into account made by the Committee at the meeting held on 24 April 2024.

The Governance and Audit Committee Terms of Reference report was proposed and seconded. A vote took place by show of hands and it was unanimously agreed to approve the Terms of Reference.

RESOLVED that Council approves the adoption of the Governance and Audit Committee draft Terms of Reference attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

10 COUNTY COUNCIL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Corporate Director: Governance and Business, 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 11.30 a.m.