

COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the County Council held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin LL15 1YN and by Video Conference on Tuesday, 12 November 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, Elen Heaton, Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Martyn Hogg, Carol Holliday, Alan Hughes, Hugh Irving, Alan James, Brian Jones, Delyth Jones, Diane King, Julie Matthews, James May, Jason McLellan, Barry Mellor, Terry Mendies, Raj Metri, Will Price, Arwel Roberts (Vice-Chair), Anton Sampson, Gareth Sandilands, Peter Scott (Chair), Rhys Thomas, 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 Audit (LT); Head of Highways and Environmental Services (PJ); Head of Corporate Support Services – People (CR); Democratic Services Manager (SP); Zoom Host and Webcast (NH) and Committee Administrator (SLW)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jon Harland, Geraint Lloyd-Williams, Merfyn Parry and Andrea Tomlin

At this juncture, the Chair, Councillor Peter Scott, welcomed two new Councillors to their first Full Council meeting. Councillors Will Price and Anton Sampson had recently been successful at two by-elections in Rhyl and Prestatyn respectively.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters raised.

At this juncture, the Chair informed members that there were two questions which had been received.

Question 1

Question put forward by Councillor Terry Mendies to the Lead Member for Local Development and Planning, Councillor Alan James –

“In May of this year planning breaches in the county totalled 561, that had more than doubled from 250 breaches 16 months earlier. Why is that?”

On 30th November, in less than 3 weeks, the Head of Enforcement is leaving DCC to start a new position in Scotland.

The other enforcement officer has already transferred to another department within DCC. Have these vacant positions been advertised, if not, why not?

Also, given that there is such a high number of breaches, and given that Flintshire has just engaged an extra 2 enforcement officers, does he think we should be employing more than 2?”

The Lead Member for Local Development and Planning, Councillor Alan James, responded as follows:

The increase in planning breaches during the past two years was largely due to the employment of two temporary placed Improvement Officers funded by shared prosperity funding. These two officers had been proactively identifying breaches and problems in order to take action to improve those properties. This proactive action had meant that the total breaches recorded had increased.

There were currently two permanent planning compliance officers within the Development Management Team. The Principal Planning Compliance Officer postholder had been successful in securing a post outside Denbighshire County Council. We would like to thank him for all his excellent work and wish him all the best in his new role. This situation happened 2-3 weeks ago and since then approval from CET had been secured for the recruitment panel to advertise this post which was being processed. The Planning Officer Compliance post was currently vacant as the postholder had secured promotion into another role in the Development Management Team.

I am well aware that DCC services were being asked to consider all options to make significant savings for 2025/2026. Not filling the post was one of those options to make savings. Therefore, this vacant post would be an option that members would need to debate over the coming weeks. No decision had been made to delete this post to date.

It was also confirmed that Flintshire County Council were not advertising for two Planning Enforcement Officers. All councils employed a wide range of Enforcement Officers from across various services, and, therefore, these alleged two new posts may be different roles to Planning Enforcement.

Councillor Terry Mendies then asked a supplementary question as follows:

“Given that these planning breaches have more than doubled and given that some of these planning breaches date back 13 years, and given that the Head of Service is taking £120,000 of tax payers money each year, does the Lead Member think that the tax payer is getting value for money?”

Councillor Alan James responded to agree to contact Councillor Mendies in due course with a response to his supplementary question.

Question 2

Question put forward by Councillor Brian Jones to the Lead Member for Environment and Transport, Councillor Barry Mellor –

“Could there be an explanation from the Lead Member regarding the lack of waste bin collections in Rhyl over the last two weekends - i.e. weekends of Saturday the 2nd and 9th Nov 2024. Numerous complaints have been received. Why has that happened in Rhyl over the last two weekends. I believe it has happened in Prestatyn and elsewhere.”

Councillor Barry Mellor responded as follows:

The DCC Streetscene Team continue to work very hard to clear the waste from the streets despite a difficult and challenging financial position. Shared Prosperity Fund money had been used in recent years to support the service by providing additional resources during the peak tourism season.

In October 2024, this funding arrangement ceased, which meant the team were now working through and implementing a revised service schedule to ensure the waste was collected in an expedient manner. This may, at times, mean that clearance days are moved from weekends to the beginning of a working week.

The service was actively working to address this issue and to provide a regular weekend waste clearance activity moving forward.

Councillor Brian Jones then asked a supplementary question as follows:

“Will the Lead Member issue to the public what he has run through, what is going to happen to remedy this on the run down to Christmas and can he do that as soon as possible? Residents do not understand what is happening. The Lead Member has just alluded to the Shared Prosperity Fund supporting the collections has now stopped, therefore, can he issue something to the media so that residents understand what is happening, and what is likely to happen on the run down to Christmas so it is clear to everyone in Denbighshire.”

Councillor Barry Mellor responded to the supplementary question put forward by Councillor Brian Jones.

Councillor Mellor confirmed he was happy to put a communication out to the public to keep them fully informed.

4 CHAIRMAN'S DIARY

The Chair, Councillor Peter Scott, reported on the civic events he had attended.

RESOLVED that the Chairman's diary be noted.

5 MINUTES

The minutes of Full Council held on 10 September 2024 were submitted.

Matters Arising –

Page 10 – 3rd bullet point “*the number of new council houses built during this administration was a disappointing figure*”. Councillor Rhys Thomas, Lead Member for Housing and Communities, stated he wanted it noted within the minutes that some of the facts were incorrect. DCC were building new council houses, adapting existing properties and buying back properties to again be council houses. In the Wales table, DCC provide more affordable housing than any other Local Authority or at least in the top five. Councillor Thomas stated he would be willing to meeting with the Councillor who stated this at the previous Council meeting to look at all the data.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the minutes of Full Council held on 10 September 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

6 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND PLAN FOR 2025/26 - 2027/28

The Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Assets, Councillor Gwyneth Ellis, introduced the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Plan for 2025/26 – 2027/28 (previously circulated).

The report provided an update on the implications for setting the 2025/26 budget including savings under consideration.

Cost pressures in 2025/26 were a mid-range of £18m with similar ranges forecast for 2026/27 and 2027/28.

The Leader, Councillor Jason McLellan stated there had been a UK budget and Wales had received a better than expected settlement. The Leader, Head of Finance and the Lead Member for Finance had attended a meeting the previous day with Welsh Government and the budget was to be announced on 10 December 2024. Until the budget announcement on 10 December, no settlement figures would be released.

At this juncture, Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts asked if the recommendations contained within the report could be voted on individually rather than on block. He felt that the final recommendation of the report 3.4 regarding setting a balanced budget and an increase in Council Tax higher than 2024/25 should be voted on separately.

It was confirmed that to balance the budget for 2025/26 some services would have to be reduced, more money would need to be spent on some services, and the only way to balance the budget would be to increase Council Tax. Within the report was an indication but not definite figures of the prospective rise in Council Tax.

Prioritising the impact on services was an important part of the process but had to recognise the impact would also potentially be negatively impacted. Therefore, a cumulative impact assessment would be presented at the Strategic Equality and Diversity Group.

At this point, Councillor Terry Mendies raised the issue of Planning Enforcement Officers. He stated they should be revenue raisers to assist with the financial position the council was facing.

Following discussions, it was stated that it would be the decision of the Chair of Council as to whether the recommendations would be voted on block or separately. The Chair confirmed the vote would take place on block. Councillor Gwyneth Ellis PROPOSED the recommendations contained within the report, SECONDED by Councillor Jason McLellan.

A vote took place and a majority of members agreed to accept the recommendations set out in the report.

RESOLVED that the Council –

- (i) Endorses the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Plan for 2025/26 – 2027/28 as set out in Appendix 1 and the current assumptions and estimates upon which it is based;*
- (ii) Reviewed, considered and feeds back any comments on the savings proposals as set out in Appendix 2 to Cabinet;*
- (iii) Endorses the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Plan for 2025/26 – 2027/28 at Appendix 3 and the on-going work to set a balanced budget in 2025/26;*
- (iv) Acknowledges that should the funding position from Welsh Government not improve, setting a balanced budget will require (i) reductions to some services (ii) increased funding to other services due to increased costs and demands of statutory functions that predominantly protect the most vulnerable residents and (iii) increases in Council Tax.*

7 NOTICE OF MOTION

Notice of Motion put forward by Councillor Martyn Hogg on behalf of the Green Party as follows –

“We confirm that Denbighshire Council supports the campaign to devolve management of the Crown Estate and its assets in Wales to the Welsh Government and that the funds raised be used by Local Authorities to support the social needs of the people who live in Wales.

We ask the Leader to write to the Welsh Government outlining our support to help persuade Westminster to devolve the Crown Estate as a matter of urgency”.

Following a brief discussion, the Leader agreed to write to the Welsh Government.

A vote took place and a majority of members voted in favour of the Notice of Motion.

RESOLVED that Council approves the Notice of Motion and the Leader, Councillor Jason McLellan to write to the Welsh Government.

8 NOTICE OF MOTION

Notice of Motion put forward by Councillor Delyth Jones on behalf of the Plaid Cymru Group as follows –

“Considering the budget crisis facing Denbighshire County Council, along with all other councils in Wales at the moment. A crisis that is inevitably going to affect the authority’s ability to supply the full range of Services as we would wish for our residents. A crisis that will almost certainly also influence the work of the City, Town and Community Councils within the County.

Due to this, the Plaid Cymru Group believe that Denbighshire County Council should take the following proactive steps in order to strengthen our relationship with and support the work of these key and important bodies.

- 1) Create a specific function within the Democratic team to Support City, Town and Community councils by being their direct point of contract.
- 2) Develop a list of payable Services that the authority can offer to the councils.
- 3) Develop joint plans with the City, Town and Community councils that could generate income for them”.

It was confirmed it was a priority to work with City, Town and Community Councils.

There was currently a project within the Transformation Programme which was looking how the Local Authority worked with City, Town and Community Councils including the potential of a liaison post. The project was required to go through the appropriate processes to establish the Business case to be considered by the Budget and Transformation Board. The creation of a post would fall under the Executive Branch of the Authority, it was not a decision for the Council.

Councillor Julie Matthews moved that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Budget and Transformation Board for further consideration. It was confirmed that stakeholders and County Councillors be part of the consultation process.

The Monitoring Officer stated that for clarity, the Council had a Transformation Programme and the purpose of the Programme was to save money and to realign the way the Council worked to ensure it worked in the most efficient way possible. It would take advantage of working with partners and stakeholders in various different aspects of its business. There was a project to consider how this was done in terms of City, Town and Community Councils. A suggestion may be that in order to achieve bigger efficiency but greater savings would need to work differently. The business case had to be tested and no decisions had yet been made. The appropriate place for this to be discussed in detail was through the Budget and Transformation Board, through Budget Workshops and if and when it became a proposal it would come back before Members. This was not a decision to be taken at a Council meeting without a report or a business case, and it would fall under the executive branch of decision making.

A vote took place and it was unanimously agreed and, **RESOLVED** that the Notice of Motion be discussed at the Budget and Transformation Board together with the Business Case and the to come back to Full Council at a future date.

9 COUNTY COUNCIL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Monitoring Officer introduced and summarised the latest position of the Council and Council Workshop Forward Work Programme.

Three additions Council for January 2025 –

- (i) Annual Review of Polling Places
- (ii) Annual Report – Governance and Audit Committee
- (iii) Annual Report – Standards Committee

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the Council's Forward Work Programme and the Council Workshop Forward Work Programme be noted.

The meeting concluded at 11.45 pm.