

COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the County Council held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin LL15 1YN on Tuesday, 3 February 2015 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Raymond Bartley, Brian Blakeley (Chair), Joan Butterfield, Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones, Bill Cowie, Ann Davies, James Davies, Meirick Davies, Richard Davies, Stuart Davies, Peter Duffy, Hugh Evans, Peter Evans, Bobby Feeley, Carys Guy, Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Colin Hughes, Rhys Hughes, Hugh Irving, Alice Jones, Huw Jones, Pat Jones, Gwyneth Kensler (Vice-Chair), Geraint Lloyd-Williams, Jason McLellan, Bob Murray, Peter Owen, Dewi Owens, Paul Penlington, Arwel Roberts, Gareth Sandilands, David Simmons, Barbara Smith, David Smith, Julian Thompson-Hill, Joe Welch, Cefyn Williams, Cheryl Williams and Eryl Williams

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (MM), Head of Finance and Assets (PM), Deputy Monitoring Officer / Solicitor (LJ), and Committee Administrators (KJ and SLW)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ian Armstrong, Martyn Holland, Barry Mellor, Win Mullen-James, Merfyn Parry, Bill Tasker and Huw Williams

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Jason McLellan and Meirick Lloyd Davies declared a personal interest in Item 6 – Budget 2015/16 – 2016/17

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters were raised.

4 CHAIRMAN'S DIARY

A list of civic engagements undertaken by the Chair for the period 29.11.2014 to 25.01.2015 had been circulated prior to the meeting.

RESOLVED that the list of civic engagements undertaken for the Council by the Chair be received.

5 MINUTES

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 17 November 2014 were submitted.

Councillors Joe Welch and Cheryl Williams both stated that they had attended the meeting but their names had not been included as present.

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 9 December 2014 were submitted.

Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts and Meirick Lloyd Davies queried the fact that not all Councillors who contributed during debates were mentioned in the minutes. Both Councillors were of the opinion their comments should be recorded accordingly.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed she would raise their concerns with the Monitoring Officer and also to the Committee staff.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the minutes of the 17th November, 2014 and 9 December 2014 be confirmed as a correct record.

6 BUDGET FOR 2015/16

The Lead Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill, presented the Budget 2015/16 (Final Proposals – Phase 3) report (previously circulated) for members to approve the final phase of the programme of budget savings and other measures in order to deliver the revenue budget for 2015/16. The report included a proposed level of increase to Council Tax and use of general balances.

In 2015/16, there would be a savings target of £8.3m. The first two phases of the budget process had identified savings of £7.3m for 2015/16 which left a gap of £1m.

Councillor Thompson-Hill clarified the number of changes between the Draft and Final Settlement and the impact upon the funding gap. The differences would contribute £473k to the saving requirement for 2015/16.

As part of the 2014/15 budget, it had been agreed, as a one-off measure, to use general balances of £500k to meet the gap in the council's funding requirement. At the December 2014 budget workshop, members were presented with a proposal for continued use of £500k to fund the budget for the next three years and those members present reiterated their views to prioritise the delivery of the Corporate Plan in future budget rounds.

Members present at the December 2014 budget workshop also informally supported an average rise in Council Tax of 2.75%. This had been the base planning figure used in the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Councillor David Smith, Lead Member for Public Realm, reiterated to Council members that following a request from Councillor Eryl Williams at Cabinet, he had written to the seven North Wales Assembly Members (AMs). Councillor Smith had

requested the AMs position regarding the impact that the removal of the grant funding associated with the Local Government Borrowing Initiative (LGBI) for investment would have on road maintenance. The funding had enabled Local Authorities to invest significant amounts of capital in improving the highway infrastructure which had helped address the backlog of deterioration. Without the funding, road conditions would deteriorate at an accelerating rate which would have a negative impact upon road safety and the local economy.

Councillor Smith also requested the AMs position regarding the allocation of funding for the M4 relief road. Responses had been requested by 29 January. At the time of the Council meeting taking place, Councillor Smith had received four written responses and one verbal response. Responses were yet to be received from Assembly Members Ken Skates (Clwyd South) and Ann Jones (Vale of Clwyd).

In-depth discussion took place and the following points were raised:

- i) Members raised concerns of the impact on the residents of Denbighshire due to the budget cuts. The Chief Executive assured members that a Scrutiny Task & Finish Group had been set up to scrutinise impact assessments. The impact assessments were to also include Welsh deprivation. A special meeting would be taking place on Thursday 5 February to work through the 20 most complex items within the budget.
- ii) The issue of Care Homes had been discussed at Cabinet. Again, the Chief Executive reiterated that the needs of the residents were paramount. Unless a suitable alternative could be sought then no Care Homes would be closed.
- iii) Cuts to school budgets. Councillor Jason McLellan declared an interest in this item as his son attended Prestatyn High School. Due to the number of secondary school pupils declining, funding to the relevant schools would decrease accordingly. If the numbers of pupils in the future increased, the funding would increase also. In March 2014, all schools had been made aware of the possible cuts due to pupil numbers and information had also been presented to the School Budget Forum. The budgets ought to be manageable and teams were looking at individual cases to work with the schools. Funding by the Welsh Government to Post 16 Sixth Forms had also been reduced.
- iv) Charging for future disability services. The charges would only be sought from people who could afford them.
- v) The Chief Executive stated that he had not yet received formal notification from the Welsh Government that the merger with Conwy County Borough Council would not be going ahead. Alternative notification had been received that the merger would not now be proceeding. Denbighshire now had a two year financial strategy and the main focus would be the Corporate Plan.

Members agreed the level of cuts had been extremely difficult and it had been important to have a process in place for a balanced budget to be delivered.

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill proposed the four recommendations be dealt with individually. Seconded by Councillor Hugh Evans.

A recorded vote was requested by Councillor Paul Penlington and supported by the requisite 1/6 of members present.

Recommendation (i) -That Council approves the budget proposals for 2015/16 as shown in appendix 1 of the report

22 members voted in favour of the recommendation:

Councillors J R Bartley, B Blakeley, W L Cowie, J A Davies, J M Davies, M LI Davies, R J Davies, S A Davies, P C Duffy, H H Evans, P A Evans, R L Feeley, H Hilditch-Roberts, H C Irving, H LI Jones, P W Owen, D Owens, B A Smith, D I Smith, J Thompson-Hill, J S Welch and E W Williams.

16 members voted against the recommendation:

Councillors J A Butterfield, J Chamberlain Jones, C L Guy, C Hughes, T R Hughes, E A Jones, P M Jones, G Lloyd-Williams, J M McLellan, R M Murray, P Penlington, A Roberts, G Sandilands, D Simmons, C H Williams and C L Williams.

One member abstained - Councillor G M Kensler

Recommendation (ii) – that the Council approves the resulting Council Tax increase of an average of 2.75% in 2015/16

36 members voted in favour of the recommendation:

Councillors J R Bartley, J A Butterfield, J Chamberlain Jones, W L Cowie, J A Davies, J M Davies, M LI Davies, R J Davies, SA Davies, P C Duffy, H H Evans, P A Evans, R L Feeley, C L Guy, H Hilditch-Roberts, C Hughes, H C Irving, E A Jones, H LI Jones, P M Jones, G Lloyd-Williams, J M McLellan, R M Murray, P W Owen, D Owens, P Penlington, A Roberts, G Sandilands, D Simmons, B A Smith, D I Smith, J Thompson-Hill, J S Welch, C H Williams, C L Williams, and E W Williams.

One member voted against the recommendation:

Councillor T R Hughes

Two members abstained:

Councillors B Blakeley and G M Kensler

At this juncture members agreed that recommendations (iii) and (iv) would be voted by a show of hands rather than a recorded vote and were unanimously in favour of the recommendations.

RESOLVED that :

- (i) Council approve the budget proposals for 2015/16*
- (ii) Council approve the resulting Council Tax increase of an average of 2.75% in 2015/16*
- (iii) Council approve the use of £500k in general balances to support the revenue budget for the next three financial years*
- (iv) Council approve the recommendation that the delivery of the Corporate Plan takes priority in future budget setting rounds.*

7 COUNTY COUNCIL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced the Council's Forward Work Programme (previously circulated).

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

The meeting concluded at 12 noon.