

COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the County Council held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin LL15 1YN on Tuesday, 31 January 2017 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Joan Butterfield, Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones, Ann Davies (Chair), Meirick Davies, Peter Duffy, Hugh Evans, Bobby Feeley, Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Martyn Holland, Colin Hughes, Rhys Hughes, Hugh Irving, Alice Jones, Huw Jones, Pat Jones, Gwyneth Kensler, Geraint Lloyd-Williams, Jason McLellan, Barry Mellor, Dewi Owens, Merfyn Parry, Paul Penlington, Pete Prendergast, Arwel Roberts, Anton Sampson, Gareth Sandilands, David Simmons, Barbara Smith, David Smith, Julian Thompson-Hill, Joe Welch, Cefyn Williams, Cheryl Williams, Eryl Williams, Huw Williams and Mark Young

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (MM), Corporate Director: Economic & Community Ambition (RM), Head of Legal, HR & Democratic Services (GW), Head of Finance (RW), Head of Facilities, Assets & Housing (JG) and Committee Administrator (SLW)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brian Blakeley, Bill Cowie, Stuart Davies, Peter Evans, Alan James, Win Mullen-James, Bob Murray, Bill Tasker and David Williams

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Jason McLellan, Martyn Holland and Meirick Lloyd Davies declared personal interests

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters.

At this juncture, the Chair paid tribute to the late Councillor Raymond Bartley who had passed away just before Christmas.

Tributes were paid by Councillor Gwyneth Kensler, on behalf of Plaid Cymru, Councillor Joe Welch on behalf of the Independent Group, Councillor Colin Hughes, on behalf of the Labour Group and Councillor Martyn Holland, on behalf of the Conservative Group.

Condolences were conveyed to Councillor Bartley's wife and family and as a mark of respect, all in attendance stood in silent tribute.

The Chair then spoke regarding the Holocaust Memorial Day. She read a poem, Yn gyntaf fe ddaethon nhw (First they came) followed by the Leader, Councillor Hugh Evans reading a poem entitled "Birdsong" which had been written especially for this year's theme by Gillian Clarke, the National Poet of Wales.

4 CHAIRMAN'S DIARY

A list of civic engagements undertaken by the Chair and Vice-Chair for the period 5 December 2016 – 27 January 2017 had been circulated prior to the meeting.

The Chair commended the Curriculum Enrichment Co-ordinator, Sarah Dixon, for arranging the Harry Potter events at the schools.

The Chair also attended the premier of the Star Wars film which had featured local Rhyl man, Spencer Wilding as Darth Vader.

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

5 MINUTES

The minutes of Full Council held on 6 December 2016 were submitted.

At this juncture, Councillor Arwel Roberts wished to thank the Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services for the work carried out regarding "Drones". Councillor Roberts extended thanks to Councillor Jason McLellan and the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group who discussed "Drones" and also the businesses who rely on them.

RESOLVED that subject to the above, the minutes of Full Council held on 6 December, 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

6 APPROVAL OF THE COUNCIL'S BUDGET

The Lead Member for Finance, Corporate Plan and Performance, Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill, presented the Budget 2017/18 – Final Proposals Report (previously circulated).

The report set out the implications of the Local Government Settlement 2017/2018 and proposals to finalise the budget for 2017/2018.

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.

The purpose of the report was to provide an overview of the budget process, the impact of the Local Government Settlement and to consider proposals to set the budget for 2017/18, including the level of Council Tax.

The final Local Government Settlement for 2017/18 had been received on 21 December 2016 and provided a cash increase of 0.6%. The Provisional Settlement

provided an increase of 0.5%. Although the Settlement provided for a cash increase, in real terms, it was a cut as it took no account of inflation or service demand pressures.

As the funding for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme had been frozen for several years, the Council had to fund the cost of Council Tax increases, estimated at £350k. The proposals would allow for £200k of new investment in priorities.

The level of Council Tax increase proposed was 2.75%. This was in line with assumptions around inflation for the coming year and was likely to be below the average level of increase in Wales.

At the Budget Workshop in November 2016, there had been some debate around the level of Council Tax rise and the subsequent impact on the budget of higher or lower levels of increase.

Given the range of pressures the Council faces, particularly the continuing pressures on social care budgets and the trajectory of general inflation, a rise of 2.75% was thought to be prudent and sustainable.

The Leader, Councillor Hugh Evans reminded Members this would be the final budget the current Council would set and would be the most important. The term of the current Council had been the most challenging Denbighshire had faced, but during that, Denbighshire had continued as one of the highest performing Councils in Wales. The Council would need to change how they delivered services in the future.

The Leader went on to thank the Lead Member for Finance, Corporate Plan and Performance, Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill and the Finance Team for their work during the term of the current council.

During debate the following were discussed:

- Energy efficiency – the council were members of a procurement framework which meant the best rates available for both gas and electricity. The price of oil has risen which had caused an increase in prices. The Local Authority do the best to minimise energy costs eg: replacing street lighting with LED lighting, work had been carried out regarding swimming pool covers to conserve energy. There were a lot of Victorian buildings under the ownership of the council which were not energy efficient, therefore there were variances in external costs.
- Denbighshire had no input into the Police precept as they are an autonomous body for which Denbighshire collect and forward the amount they expect. This was the most efficient way for all elements to be collected in one go.
- Most of the grants announced to date had a small reduction but were not massively cut.
- In terms of the PFI, it was terminated to realise savings. Other councils had since contacted Denbighshire requesting advice regarding their PFI building contracts.

- The Well-being Impact Assessments were criticised by some members as they did not contain sufficient information. It had been confirmed by the Lead Member for Finance, Corporate Plan and Performance that the Assessments were new but were a work in progress and, therefore, not the finished article. The Chief Executive had asked they be included in every recommendation for all public committee's hereon in.
- A number of members expressed their disagreement to the recommended rise of 2.75% for Council Tax. It was stated that this debate had taken place at the budget workshops and agreement had been obtained to carry the 2.75% forward to Full Council for approval.

The Chief Executive clarified to Members that this was the final budget for the current council. During the previous 5 years, investment had taken place in schools and libraries, Leisure had done extremely well. While taking £30million out of Denbighshire's expenditure, the council had maintained its position as one of the leading councils.

There had been pressure on the Council, 15% of staff had been lost during the past 5 years, 10 official council buildings had gone to 4 and would soon be down to 3. This had saved money for the council whilst not impacting on the quality of the service. This year £1.9million has been put into education and increasing social care.

It was forecast that the current year would probably be the last of the good budgets. The budget had been balanced utilising cash but that was not sustainable.

It was important to appreciate what had been done well during the past 5 years but the future predicted to show difficult times ahead for all councils.

At this juncture Councillor Rhys Hughes PROPOSED the council tax level be set at 2.5%, SECONDED by Councillor Arwel Roberts.

The Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services explained that the amendment put forward by Councillor Rhys Hughes, seconded by Councillor Arwel Roberts would be voted on in the first instance for a council tax rise of 2.5%.

VOTE:
 For – 4
 Abstain – 1
 Against – 27

Therefore, the amendment was defeated.

Lead Member, Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill PROPOSED the original recommendation for a council tax rise of 2.75%, SECONDED by the Leader, Councillor Hugh Evans.

At this juncture, it was agreed by all Members that the date of the budget workshop (1 November 2016) be deleted from the recommendation.

VOTE:
For – 29
Abstain – 1
Against – 4

RESOLVED that Council:

- *Note the impact of the Local Government Settlement 2017/18*
- *Approves the proposals outlined in Appendix 1, in order to finalise the 2017/18 budget*
- *Approves the resulting average Council Tax rise of 2.75% required to support the budget proposals.*

7 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

The Lead Member for Finance, Corporate Plan and Performance, Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill, presented the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2017/18 Report (previously circulated).

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 contained provisions to abolish council tax benefit in its current form across the UK. From 31 March 2013, council tax benefit ceased, and the responsibility for providing support for council tax and the funding associated with it had been passed to the Welsh Government. The Welsh Government, in partnership with Local Authorities in Wales, introduced a new scheme to provide council tax support which was adopted by the Council in January 2013.

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill PROPOSED the report recommendations, SECONDED by Councillor Colin Hughes.

VOTE:
For – 34
Abstain – 0
Against - 0

RESOLVED that Members:

- *Adopt the Council Tax Reduction Schemes and Prescribed Requirements (Wales) Regulations 2013 and the Prescribed Requirements (Wales) Amendments Regulations 2017, in respect of the 2017/18 financial year.*
- *Approve the 3 discretionary elements of the scheme, shown in section 4.2 for 2017/18*

At this juncture (12.10 p.m.) there was a 25 minute break.

The meeting reconvened at 12.35 p.m.

8 APPROVAL OF RHYL AQUATIC CENTRE

The Leader, Councillor Hugh Evans, introduced the report (previously circulated) for Members to consider proposals for the development of the “Rhyl Waterpark and Leisure Attraction” – working title (RWLA).

The future upgrading of the leisure and tourism offer on the coastal front was considered the most critical element of the overall regeneration of Rhyl – serving as a better place to live as well as a great place to visit. The sequence of events leading to the development proposal had spanned over 6 years.

It was important to note that the proposals for the new “Waterfront” had been developed in such a way as to compliment the whole coastal regeneration plan and, because of its location, serving as a catalyst for attracting more footfall into Rhyl and driving increased visitor numbers through the Town Centre.

The location close to the town centre had been considered to be very important with regard to the regeneration and footfall creation of objectives of the development.

During the term of this council, there had taken place more strategic planning. The Rhyl Aquatic Centre was to be an investment for generations with the hope Rhyl would move from a challenging regeneration project to one of economic development.

The Corporate Director: Economic and Community Ambition confirmed to Members the current strategy was to move Rhyl to an area of economic development and the key project was to increase footfall into the town to create more jobs and allow more opportunities for local residents.

The previous phase of regeneration had created new homes with active residents and work would now commence with the waterfront development.

The Economic Impact Assessment showed additional finance into the town together with 60 additional jobs for local people who would be well placed for those jobs when made available.

The Head of Facilities, Assets and Management introduced a presentation to expand on the details of the Rhyl Waterpark and Leisure attraction. An explanation of the two options was detailed and reasons why officers considered Option 2 to be the preferred option, both on grounds of cost but more importantly customer and resident experience.

Rhyl Town Council were to make a capital contribution of £2million, together with a contribution from the Welsh Government of £800,000. Those contributions would reduce the Council’s capital contribution and Prudential Borrowing costs by approximately £159,000.

For the purpose of the business case, the income targets were extremely conservative and those were expected to be exceeded. Local Partnerships were comfortable that the business case income assumptions based on 60% occupancy were achievable by year 5 and were a prudent basis of budgeting. The Council’s current track record (strong leisure model – Nova) was 76% occupancy level across its other facilities.

The next steps were to start the planning process with full public engagement regarding the planning elements of the scheme. If planning approval were to be obtained in July 2017, the project would commence on site in September 2017 with the opening of the new facility in early 2019.

The Head of Finance explained the options for funding years 1-4.

The Lead Member for Finance, Corporate Plan and Performance confirmed the recommendation from the Strategic Investment Group had been to agree to Option 2. Reassurances had been given that this had been a very rigorously reviewed project. It would be largely dependent on the occupancy hitting the 60% target and by year 5 the council would be looking at a cost neutral proposal for the project.

During intense discussion, the following points were raised:

- Lessons learnt since the Nova project – time needed to be taken on the Rhyl Waterfront attraction as it was to be such a vast facility. Detailed studies had taken place of the water sports north of the A55 and detailed analysis of the Sun Centres final years. The facility approach had always been to compliment other attractions.
- It had been a difficult decision to close the Sun Centre but the new waterfront attraction would be an asset to the coast and Denbighshire as a county.
- Rhyl Leisure Centre were to retain the swimming pool as local schools and swimming clubs utilised the facility for swimming lessons.
- The new waterfront attraction would include an indoor and outdoor splash park – the indoor facility would remain open all year round. A large climbing structure, food and beverage offer, indoor and outdoor spectating, indoor and outdoor changing rooms, were to be included within the facility.
- The skate park was to be relocated following discussion with the community and young people who utilised the park.
- Regarding affordability and travel to the facility. It will be positioned centrally for easy access to buses, trains and car parking. A discount price was to be offered to Denbighshire residents who were holders of a leisure card. The current predicted cost of a family ticket would be £39.
- The underground car park located near to the sky tower area, was to be upgraded to ensure maximum use by car users.
- A number of Councillors expressed concern regarding risk with regards to the amount of £2million due from Rhyl Town Council. A question had been raised as to how the Town Council proposed to generate the funding. The Corporate Director: Economic and Community Ambition clarified to Members that Full Council was not the forum for raising this issue and it was a matter for Rhyl Town Council of how they raised their funding.
- The waterfront facility would provide year round employment for local people which would aid with the regeneration of the town.
- Marketing of the facility would be paramount and the council would provide excellent marketing in terms of social media, online presence etc. With the framework, Alliance Leisure and Neptune were to partner the council to assist the facility up to its occupancy levels.

- It was stated that profit was needed to be put back into leisure and there had been future plans for work to be carried out on various leisure centres throughout the county.
- Road and pathway signage would achieve accreditation to assist navigation of people through the town and from the A55.

The Leader, Councillor Hugh Evans PROPOSED the recommendation, SECONDED by Councillor Barry Mellor.

Thanks were extended to the whole team for their work and willingness to press forward to invest in, and improve Rhyl.

VOTE:

For – 27

Abstain – 1

Against – 0

RESOLVED that Council:

- *Approve the recommendation of the Strategic Investment Group to adopt Option 2 of the business case for development of a new Waterpark and Leisure Attraction in Rhyl as part of the overall Rhyl Regeneration and Waterfront development programme as described in Appendix B. this includes assumptions of financial contributions of £2million from Rhyl Town Council and £800,000 from the Welsh Government TISS fund.*
- *Agree the funding strategy set out in Section 6*
- *Instruct officers to progress with the next stages of implementation, including seeking planning approval and securing funding contributions from Rhyl Town Council and Welsh Government, enabling the facility to be operational by early 2019.*

9 NOTICE OF MOTION

Councillor Mark Young put forward the following Notice of Motion for the consideration of Full Council:

“That Denbighshire County Council makes parking exempt (free) for Blue Badge holders in Denbighshire County Council run car parks, thus treating disabled people in a fair and equal manner in our Authority and across North Wales”.

The Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services explained the legal position in respect of blue badge holders was not to provide free parking but to provide accessibility. It was suggested the issue be forwarded to Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group for discussion at a Scrutiny Committee following which, the process would provide a recommendation to the Executive function.

At this juncture, there was a unanimous show of hands in favour of submitting to Scrutiny.

RESOLVED that the Notice of Motion regarding free parking for blue badge holders to be presented to Scrutiny Chairs & Vice Chairs Group for consideration.

10 COUNTY COUNCIL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Monitoring Officer/ Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services introduced the Council's Forward Work Programme (previously circulated).

14 February 2017 - Review of Political Balance – this item would now be discussed at the Annual Council meeting to be held on 23 May 2017.

4 April 2017 – Remuneration for Members – this items would also now be discussed at the Annual Council meeting to be held on 23 May 2017.

RESOLVED that subject to the above, the Council Forward Work Programme be approved and noted.

The meeting concluded at 2.20 p.m.