

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
TUESDAY 27TH OCTOBER 2009

Minutes of the Special meeting of Flintshire County Council held in County Hall, Mold on Tuesday 27th October 2009.

PRESENT: **Councillor C. Legg (Chairman)**
Councillor W.O. Thomas (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors: A. Aldridge, Eng. K. Armstrong-Braun, J.B. Attridge, S.R. Baker, D. Barratt, G.H. Bateman, R.C. Bithell, C.S. Carver, J. C. Cattermoul, E.G. Cooke, D.L. Cox, P.J. Curtis, R. Davies, A.J. Davies-Cooke, Q.R.H. Dodd, R. Dolphin, B. Dunn, C.A. Ellis, E.F. Evans, J.E. Falshaw, V. Gay, F. Gillmore, R.J.T. Guest, A.M. Halford, R.G. Hampson, P.G. Heesom, C. Hinds, R. Hughes, N. Humphreys, H.D. Hutchinson, G. James, C.M. Jones, N.M. Jones, R. Jones, S. Jones, R.P. Macfarlane, D.I. Mackie, D.L. Mackie, N.M. Matthews, D. McFarlane, H.J. McGuill, A. Minshull, W. Mullin, T. Newhouse, E.W. Owen, M.J. Peers, P.R. Pemberton, M.A. Reece, H.G. Roberts, I.B. Roberts, L.A. Sharps, A.P. Shotton, N.R. Steele-Mortimer, C.A. Thomas, D.T.M. Williams, A. Woolley.

APOLOGIES:

Councillors: C. Dolphin, G. Hardcastle, H.T. Howorth, R. Johnson, N. Phillips, D.E. Wisinger, M. Wright and H. Yale.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive, Director of Lifelong Learning, Director of Environment, Director of Community Services, Head of Policy and Information Technology, Assistant Director (Democratic Services) and Democratic Services Manager.

80. PRAYERS

Prayers were said by Councillor R.C. Bithell.

81. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

82. NORTHOP BY-ELECTION

The Chief Executive, in his role as Returning Officer, advised that the by-election necessitated by the death of Councillor M. Higham would take place on Thursday 26th November 2009, with the closing date for nominations Friday 20th October.

83. BOUNDARY COMMISSION

The Chief Executive gave an update on the consultation period relating to Boundary Commission proposals, and hoped to bring information as soon as possible to Members.

84. NOTICE OF MOTION – REGISTRATION SERVICE

Councillor I.B. Roberts moved the motion and was duly seconded by L.A. Aldridge. Speaking to the motion, Councillor Roberts expressed his sadness at having to bring this matter to the County Council as he felt this was the only way to bring the democratic process into addressing this matter. He referred to a consultation letter which had been sent out on 28th July 2009 informing Members of the decision to close certain Registration Offices. Councillor Roberts indicated that he had spoken personally to the Head of Policy and Information Technology and the Customer Services Manager expressing his concerns at these proposals. The matter had also been considered by Flint Town Council who were unanimous in their opposition to the closure of the facility in Flint. He referred to the inconsistency of statistics received relating to the usage of the service. Councillor Roberts understood that the staff who operated the service did not support the proposals which they felt provided an excellent service. Councillor Roberts continued that his concern related to the fact that the decision was taken by the Corporate Management Team without any formal democratic input. He felt that it was an important service and that such decisions should not be taken without thorough investigation by Members. Although this was a specific issue, Councillor Roberts felt that it was a dangerous trend when there was no formal democratic accountability for a reduction in services, and that that was a key issue for Members to consider.

In seconding the motion, Councillor L.A. Aldridge concurred with the view that this was a policy decision and should have followed a formal democratic process. He felt that the savings identified were comparatively minimal and asked that the issue be re-examined. He expanded upon the point that it was not just the town of Flint he was referring to but the service provided to the surrounding areas.

Councillor S. Jones, supporting the proposition, felt that the service and its availability in the communities should be better advertised. She referred to the fact that in the Council's current "A-Z" there was no reference to the local offices. She was also concerned that no officer had contacted her personally to discuss the issues and the effect it would have on the community within her area.

Councillor R. Hampson also supported the motion and expressed his disappointment that the Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Governance did not formally intervene as they were both Buckley Members and the service reduction affected that area.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor A. Woolley, indicated this was an issue within the remit of the Executive Member for Corporate Governance who

was unable to be present at this meeting, but he was aware of the circumstances. The Leader indicated that it was a decision that was not taken lightly and it was the time when difficult decisions had to be made. He explained the reason behind the proposal where he felt, with these revised arrangements, a better service could be available to the public with more accessible hours which had been requested during a consultation exercise. He felt that most people who visited any of the facilities would have to travel by vehicle. He continued that it was not a penny pinching exercise but a way to improve the services. He also explained that it was not a drop-in service, wherever the facility was located and it was necessary to make an appointment. The Leader continued that it was for this reason that a single number was included in the Council Directory whereby staff had access to all the availability of appointments throughout the county and then they could advise the enquirer of the next available date at any of the locations. The person concerned could then travel to any of the locations if they so wished. He also commented that many Councillors did not respond to the consultation letter, and concluded that it was the role of the Executive to make the best use of the resources available and that they had to make difficult decisions.

Councillor Q.R.H. Dodd felt that a dedicated person should be based at Llwynegrin Hall for the registration service.

Councillor A.P. Shotton referred in particular to the second part of the motion and the importance of the democratic process in the accountability of the Council when a public service was being withdrawn. As the issue had not been submitted to the Executive for consideration there was not an opportunity to allow the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to call the decision in for discussion. Referring to the situation of the Hawarden Registration Office, he explained that was an Executive decision during the time of the previous administration and had gone through the democratic process. He commented that in his own area of Connah's Quay, it was not the intention to withdraw the facility which he said was an excellent service and something that the Council should be proud of. He felt that it was important for the Council to consider the significance of the way the decision had been taken in case it led to other major decisions not going through the democratic process. Councillor A. Halford also expressed her support for the motion and expressed her disappointment that the matter had been determined by the Corporate Management Team and not gone through the democratic process. Councillor J.B. Attridge indicated the reason he had signed the motion was that he was in favour of an open and transparent decision making process and asked that the decision taken by Corporate Management Team be rescinded.

Councillor P. Curtis reaffirmed the previously expressed view about the involvement of Members in the democratic process. He suggested that the decision may still be the same but it was necessary for it to be fully discussed and Members allowed the opportunity to contribute. Councillor H. McGuill enquired upon the response received from the consultation document in relation to the closure. Councillor B. Mullin sought clarification on the number of visitors to the Holywell as there appeared to be different figures quoted.

The Chief Executive indicated that it was necessary for the Corporate Management Team to review the quality of the service and it was for this reason the proposals were made as they felt there were major benefits particularly in relation to accessibility. He indicated it was certainly not the intention to avoid the democratic process and that consultation with Members had been undertaken.

The Head of Customer and IT Services confirmed that the letter did not go to all Members of the Council but only those whose area was directly affected. He had had one written response from Flint Town Council. He provided detailed figures of the usage of the various locations. He also confirmed that staff had been consulted and reiterated the point why there was a single contact number whereby the public could be advised of the availability of any appointments at any of the locations. He reported upon the response to the consultation process and supported the views of the Chief Executive that it was an operational issue.

The Leader of the Council indicated that he still felt the decision was correct and it would have been the same if it had been taken to Executive. However, he was happy to make a proposal that the matter be considered by the Executive which would allow the opportunity for it to be called in by the Overview and Scrutiny function. Councillor I.B. Roberts as the proposer of the motion thanked the Leader for listening to Members and his amendment for the matter to be considered by the Executive. He clarified the figures that he quoted had been provided by the Head of Information and Customer Services. Councillor N. Matthews sought clarity if the proposal would have meant that the offices would be open longer in Mold and it was confirmed that this was the case. Councillor I.B. Roberts sought clarification that the proposals would be suspended until the matter had gone to the Executive and this was confirmed. The Chief Executive indicated that when the report was submitted to Executive it would include all relevant information and the figures quoted would be accurate.

The Assistant Director (Democratic Services) advised that the amendment proposed by Councillor Woolley be voted upon and this was done and became the Substantive Motion and was carried.

RESOLVED

That the reorganisation of the registration service and the closure of out stations at Buckley, Caergwrle and Flint be suspended and referred to the Executive for consideration.

85. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2008/09

Members had been asked to bring with them to the meeting the report circulated with the agenda for the Executive which held its meeting earlier in the day. The Chief Executive introduced the report and advised that there was nothing in this report which had not been reported previously elsewhere. He confirmed that the Executive at its meeting held earlier in the day had endorsed

the report. However, it was noted that the improvement plan must be approved by the full Council before publication and that it could not be the sole responsibility of the Executive. It was also noted that a summary of the plan must be published by the end of November for general public circulation. The Council was informed that the Annual Performance Report was based upon performance out-turns and progress against the Council's strategic assessment of risks and challenges. The draft final report was that referred to earlier and had been circulated with the papers to the Executive.

The strategy requirements were met with a focus on the key risks performance and priorities within service areas. It was noted that the final plan would be available as a web based document which would be accessed via the Council's website and at libraries. Paper copies could be generated as required and the supporting documents which provided the more detailed information would be available as a signposted document. Members were also advised that the summary would be included within the household publication "Your Community Your Council".

Councillor A. Woolley as Leader of the Council moved acceptance of the report and was duly seconded by Councillor L.A. Sharps. Councillor P.G. Heesom commended the work done in achieving completion of the report. He referred to the section related to homeless people and the work still required in that area. Councillor A.P. Shotton referred to the section in the report in relation to "looked after children" and he commented upon the importance of corporate parenting. He suggested that efforts would have to be made in this area to improve the service. He also referred to the housing service and the urgent repairs which he also felt was an area of concern, together with the homelessness statistics. Councillor J.B. Attridge referred to the issue of the Single Status and felt that its status should be reconsidered from amber to red. Councillor R.C. Bithell also referred to the issue of corporate parenting and expanded upon key points in that area. He also concurred with the views in relation to Single Status. As a local Member he referred to the issue at Cae Brachty and the flood risk in that area and felt there was urgent resolution required to the situation in that area.

Councillor C. Ellis the Executive Member for Social Services responded to the points made and felt that there should be more emphasis on the positive outcomes in the report and in particular the areas where the Council had been top rated in Wales. She referred to the number of schemes that had been developed and felt that Members should be singing the praises of the staff involved in these areas. With regard to corporate parenting she suggested that Members may wish to attend the Pride of Flintshire Awards which would give a true reflection of the work done. Councillor C. Ellis concluded with comments reiterating the pride she had in the Council's staff.

Councillor N.R. Steele-Mortimer supported the comments of Councillor Ellis and reported upon the excellence of many services. He accepted there were areas for improvement and commented upon the efforts that would be made to achieve those targets. Councillor R.P. Macfarlane as Chairman of the Lifelong Learning and Overview Scrutiny Committee referred to the workshops

initiated by the Committee which he was sure would assist with the improvements.

Councillor R. Jones referred to a number of statistics and indicated that the signs were of an overall improvement. The Leader of the Council indicated that the report was on the whole good with considerable quantity of success. The proposal was put to the meeting and was carried.

RESOLVED

That the Annual Performance report for 2008/09 be approved.

86. ATTENDANCE BY THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were two members of the press in attendance.

87. DURATION OF THE MEETING

The meeting commenced at 3.00 pm and ended at 4.40 pm.

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Chairman

SUMMARY OF DECLARATIONS MADE BY MEMBERS
IN ACCORDANCE WITH FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S
CODE OF CONDUCT

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL	DATE:	27th October 2009
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MEMBER	ITEM	MIN. NO. REFERS
NO DECLARATIONS WERE MADE		