

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
WEDNESDAY 30TH JUNE, 2010

Minutes of the special meeting of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Wednesday 30th June, 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor W.O. Thomas (Chairman)

Councillors: Eng. K. Armstrong-Braun, J.B. Attridge, S.R. Baker, D. Barratt, G.H. Bateman, M. Bateman, R.C. Bithell, C.S. Carver, E.G. Cooke, D.L. Cox, R. Davies, Q.R.H. Dodd, C.J. Dolphin, B. Dunn, E.F. Evans, J.E. Falshaw, V. Gay, F. Gillmore, R.G. Hampson, C. Hinds, R. Hughes, N. Humphreys, C.M. Jones, N.M. Jones, S. Jones, C. Legg, H.J. McGuill, A. Minshull, E.W. Owen, M.J. Peers, P.R. Pemberton, H.G. Roberts, I.B. Roberts, A.P. Shotton, C.A. Thomas, D.T. Williams, D.E. Wisinger, A. Woolley, M.G. Wright and H. Yale

APOLOGIES:

Councillors: P.J. Curtis, A.J. Davies-Cooke, A.G. Diskin, G.D. Diskin, R. Dolphin, C.A. Ellis, R.J.T. Guest, A.M. Halford, G. Hardcastle, P.G. Heesom, H.T. Howorth, H.D. Hutchinson, H.T. Isherwood, G. James, R. Johnson, R.B. Jones, R.P. Macfarlane, D.I. Mackie, D.L. Mackie, N.M. Matthews, D. McFarlane, W. Mullin, N. Phillips, L.A. Sharps and N.R. Steele-Mortimer

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive, Director of Environment, Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Head of ICT and Customer Services

15. PRAYERS

The meeting was opened with Prayers said by the Chairman's Chaplin.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were received.

17. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of Flintshire County Council held on 27th April, 11th May and 25th May, 2010 were submitted.

27th April, 2010

RESOLVED

That the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

11th May, 2010

Councillor J.B. Attridge suggested an amendment to the third paragraph of agenda item number 5, that 'collective working where possible'

be replaced with 'would not happen again'. Councillor R.C. Bithell Councillor R.C. Bithell referred to the second paragraph on page 18 and said that the word 'porosity' should be replaced with 'paucity'.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services suggested an amendment to resolution (a) on item number 7(A) and the resolution on item number 7(B) that 'any changes to the' be added after the word 'That'.

Councillor A.P. Shotton referred to agenda item number 7(H) and reported that during the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) conference held on 17th June, 2010 he had gained sight of its political balance and wanted to correct Councillor S.R. Baker's statement that a Labour nomination would have affected the political balance of the WLGA as this was incorrect. Councillor S.R. Baker reiterated his previous comments that political nomination changes at a local level could have affected the political balance of the WLGA.

Councillor R.C. Bithell referred to Councillor F. Gillmore's recent appointment to Leader of the Independent Group and asked if he would be replacing Councillor P.G Heesom as a nominee on the WLGA. Councillor Gillmore clarified that during the Annual Meeting of the Council Members had resolved to elect 4 representatives on the WLGA who would continue to hold that position. He said that he could attend meetings of the WLGA as an observer but could not vote. The Chief Executive advised that the WLGA Council meetings were open to the public; therefore any Member could attend as an observer.

RESOLVED

That subject to the amendments listed above, the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

25th May, 2010

Councillor J.B. Attridge asked the Chief Executive if he could provide an update on the current position in relation to minute number 13.

The Chief Executive reported that he had written to all Members to inform them that Mrs. Sue Lewis was leaving the authority and would be taking early retirement at no additional cost to the Council. He outlined the interim management arrangements and reported that he would continue to be the Acting Director and the four Heads of Service would be acting up and sharing the duties and role of the Director. He explained that the delivery of the service would continue and that the arrangements in place were sound.

Councillor Shotton asked the Chief Executive to pass on his thanks and gratitude to Sue Lewis for the work she had undertaken during her time with the authority and said that she had been an excellent officer. He also referred to the clear message coming from the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) of the difficult financial times ahead and asked if consideration had been given to

approaching neighbouring authorities for a joint appointment to the Director post. Councillor Bithell echoed Councillor Shotton's comments on Sue Lewis and said that she had accomplished a great deal which had been identified and highlighted within the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) reports.

The Chief Executive reported that joint appointments were regularly explored but he would need to consider if this was practical. At the moment his professional view would be to appoint a Director with the same responsibilities based on the current Council structure but would continue to explore discussions with colleagues at Denbighshire County Council, Wrexham County Borough Council and the Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board on the possibility for future joint appointments.

The Chief Executive thanks Members for the remarks, which he said had been supported by the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and would be passed on to Sue Lewis.

RESOLVED

That the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

18. RESERVE FORCES & CADET ASSOCIATION FOR WALES

The Chairman welcomed Colonel Nick Beard and Colonel Phil Hubbard to the meeting, who had been invited to give a presentation on the Reserve Forces and Cadet Association for Wales (RFCA). Colonel Nick Beard gave a presentation which covered the following areas:-

- TRI Service
- RFCA Structure
- RFCA Composition
- Reserve Forces Location in Wales
- The Cadets
- Army Cadet Force Structure
- Cadet Accommodation
- Adult Volunteers
- Community Engagement
- RFCA Core Values

Members thanked Col. Beard and Col. Hubbard for their presentation. A number of questions were asked on the support received by the RFCA from the Youth Justice Service and whether there was joint working between the RFCA and the Youth Justice Service. Councillor R.G. Hampson, as a Representative Member of the RFCA, spoke to outline his support and gratitude to the volunteers from the RFCA currently serving in Afghanistan and raised concern about future financial cuts.

Councillor M.G. Wright in reference to Councillor Hampson's comments paid tribute to the bravery of Lance Corporal Alan Cochran from Pentre Halkyn who was recently killed while out on foot patrol in Helmand on 4th June, 2010 and paid his condolences to his family. He referred to the outreach programme and asked how this could be expanded. Councillor Carver asked if volunteers returning from their tour of duty would have a guarantee that their jobs would be open to them on their return.

In response to the comments and questions raised, Col. Nick Beard and Col. Phil Hubbard felt that it would be beneficial for a similar presentation to be made to the Youth Justice Service to outline the positive outcomes for young people joining the RFCA. They outlined the impact financial cuts would have and the positive outcomes from the outreach programmes, where 85% of young people attending the outreach programme did not go on to commit any offences. Further debate was needed on the future funding of the outreach programme as the National Government was not committed to providing funding for this programme. Following the introduction of legislation in 1996 where persons had been employed for longer than 12 months by the same employer, their positions should remain open to them on their return from their tour of duty.

A number of Members spoke in support of the RFCA and Councillors C.J. Dolphin and R.C. Bithell outlined the good work being carried out in Holywell and Mold. Councillor H. McGuill asked how local authorities in Wales could be encouraged to provide Cadet Force Contingents in schools.

Col. Beard reported that there were currently Cadet Force Contingents in 2 Schools in Wales. The Headteachers of these schools had spoken positively about the introduction of a Cadet Force as this had increased pupil attendance. Further debate was needed with Headteachers and School Governors on how this could be introduced across Wales.

The Chairman thanked Col. Beard and Col. Hubbard for providing the presentation and for answering the questions from Members.

RESOLVED

That the presentation be noted.

19. 'BE A PART, NOT APART' CAMPAIGN

The Chairman introduced Jackie James, Principal Health Development Specialist to the meeting, who had been invited to give a presentation on the 'Be a part, not apart' campaign. Jackie James gave a presentation which covered the following areas:-

- Mental Health
- Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing
- A framework for public mental wellbeing
- Concepts used in the Framework

- A part, not apart
- Mental Health Challenge Flintshire
- Aims and Outcomes
- Feedback

The Chairman thanked Jackie James for providing the presentation.

RESOLVED

That the presentation be noted.

20. FLINTSHIRE COMMUNITY STRATEGY – THE ‘COUNCIL VISION’

The Chief Executive presented the final version of the Flintshire Community Strategy which had been supported and endorsed by the Executive on 20th April, 2010.

The Chief Executive reported that consultation was undertaken in collaboration with the Council’s Local Service Board (LSB) partners using existing networks supplemented by public consultations. In addition, a series of workshops were held for all Members in July, 2009 and the purpose of the consultation was to secure interest, comment and endorsement of the vision. In October, 2009, the Local Service Board “signed off” the Community Strategy as a ‘county vision’ for Flintshire 2009 to 2019.

Councillor K. Armstrong-Braun proposed that the County Council support and endorse the Community Strategy as a County Vision for Flintshire. This was seconded by Councillor A. Woolley.

Councillor Bithell spoke in support of the Community Strategy which he felt highlighted the areas in need of improvement in comparison to other Counties in Wales and where areas could be built on in the future. He raised concerns over the future financial cuts which had been announced by the National Government and how this could affect the ‘Council’s Vision’. He referred to section 2.03 of the report and asked which funding would be targeted through the Community Strategy and why there were no direct financial implications associated with the report. He concluded that this was an excellent report but did not feel that a great deal of progress would be made following the announcement of the financial cuts to core services. Councillor I.B. Roberts echoed Councillor Bithell’s concerns on future funding streams and the financial cuts which he said were being announced on a daily basis. He referred to the education and skills section of the Community Strategy and sought assurance that this report would not influence future Council decision on 6th form places in schools in Flintshire. He said that the financial cuts outlined by the National Government would affect the poorest people in Flintshire who were referred to most within the Community Strategy.

Councillor Armstrong-Braun spoke in support of the report and highlighted the areas where he thought there was duplication of work and

hoped that these would be addressed through the Flintshire Community Strategy.

Councillor MJ. Peers said that the Community Strategy report was a statement of intent but lacked the necessary detail needed to take it forward. He referred to the Community Strategy document and said that this should be placed on the Overview and Scrutiny Committees forward work programme to ensure Members were informed of emerging developments and outcomes and have continued opportunities to contribute to the process. With regard to Town Centres, as outlined within the document, he felt that there was a need for more engagement with planning in order to ensure that Town Centres were popular local centres for surrounding communities. He also referred to the LDP and felt that in order to build sustainable communities further links with the LDP were needed, but felt that this was not included in the document. Also further promotion of public footpaths in Flintshire was needed in order to promote and protect health and well-being.

Councillor Dolphin said that the Community Strategy did not reflect the recent achievements made at Greenfield Primary School as included within the Estyn Inspection Report. He referred to local Police Inspectors who, he felt, could not carry out their roles effectively as they had to cover too large an area. Councillor D. Wisinger concurred with Councillor Dolphin's comments and felt that too much of police time was spent attending various public meetings to discuss similar issues.

Councillor C.A Thomas said that the Community Strategy had been considered at Executive twice and at various workshops but raised concern that feedback had not been given on why some of the Members comments had not been taken into consideration when producing the final version. Councillor A.P. Shotton said that representatives from the voluntary sector had contacted him and raised similar concerns to those outlined by Councillor Thomas on feedback on their input. He also concurred with previous concerns on the financial cuts set out by the National Government.

The Chief Executive responded to the comments made and said that feedback could have been improved on commentary provided by consultees and assured Members that representatives of the voluntary sector had played a key part in producing the Community Strategy. Update reports on the progress of the projects were reported to Executive twice yearly and were included within the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's forward work programme. The Community Strategy was also subject to periodic review in consultation with the Councils' partners. He referred to the comments on the LDP and advised that the Community Strategy would provide the opportunity to create a synergy between the planning process and the LDP which would be required for effective community planning. The Community Strategy would be used as a lobbying tool for funding and for influencing purposes as it set out the Council's priorities. On the issues around local policing, he said that had spoken to the new Chief Constable of North Wales Police in order to establish closer working through the Community Strategy.

RESOLVED

That the County Council support and endorse the Community Strategy as a County Vision for Flintshire.

21. NOTICE OF MOTION

The following Notice of Motion had been submitted by Councillor A. Woolley:-

“That this Council should adopt the policy that incoming letters and e-mails should be acknowledged within 10 working days and, thereafter, if the subject matter is still undergoing process, be advised of progress at periods no greater than 21 days until matters are completed and that fact advised to the enquirer as soon as the formal decision is properly made. Further, that any failure to follow and adhere to this policy, once adopted, without justifiable excuse, should be cause for an adverse notation to be placed in the record of service of the addressee, provided that good and sufficient record exists of the receipt of the enquiry by the addressee. Further, that where no such proper record is found to exist of the receipt of any enquiry by an addressee office routines shall be examined and adjustments made to guarantee proper recording of enquiries in any future instance”.

Councillor Woolley explained his reasons for submitting his notice of motion outlining his concern that Members and members of the public were experiencing difficulties in receiving responses from Officers on issues raised. He felt that the majority of Officers were responding to issues/enquiries within 10 working days but there were a small minority that were not. He therefore commended the notice of motion to the Council.

Councillor J.B. Attridge raised concern that the Leader of the Council had submitted a notice of motion similar to a notice of motion previously submitted by Councillor Q.R.H. Dodd which had been considered by the Constitution Committee. He said that he regularly received responses to letters/e-mails and if he did not receive a response he would raise it with the appropriate Director. He said that a protocol was already in place that Officers should respond to letters/e-mails within 10 days and if this was not adhered to there were procedures in place for dealing with this.

Councillor Woolley gave notice of an amendment to his notice of motion.

Councillor C. Carver spoke in support of the notice of motion and outlined a number of instances where he had not received responses from Officers during his time as a Member and as a member of the public writing to the Council. Councillor Pemberton also supported the notice of motion which he felt would improve relations between the Council and members of the public.

Councillor A.P. Shotton felt that the Leader of the Council was sending out an unnecessary message to all Officers as there was a policy in place which he, together with the Corporate Management Team and Executive should be encouraging a small minority of Officers to adhere to. He gave notice of an amendment to the notice of motion 'That this Council adhere to the existing Communications Policy of responses to enquiries and calls on the Corporate Management Team to bring forward proposals to ensure compliance to that policy'. This amendment was seconded by Councillor Attridge.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services sought clarification from the Leader of the Council on whether the notice of motion would apply to Members as well as Officers of the authority. Councillor Woolley responded that the notice of motion did not distinguish between officers and Members.

The Chief Executive invited the Head of ICT and Customer Services to give an update on the work being undertaken to address the issues arising from the County Council meeting held on 16th December, 2009 and the Constitution Committee held on 27th January, 2010.

The Head of ICT and Customer Services reported that the Constitution Committee at its meeting on 27th January, 2010 accepted the proposals and recommendations from CMT on how to address inconsistencies when dealing with Member enquiries. He reported that a Members survey was conducted to measure their satisfaction levels and identify areas of good and bad practice but said that he was disappointed in the number of questionnaires returned. He outlined the next steps which would be to contact Directors to seek a suitable officer to take on the role of contact officer for Member service enquiries and to produce a guidance document for staff and communicate this to staff.

Councillor Armstrong-Braun said that in view of the update given by the Head of ICT and Customer Services he could not support the notice of motion. He felt that the Leader of the Council and the Executive should manage the existing policy and advised that Members Services could chase responses from Officers on behalf of Members. Councillor I.B. Roberts agreed with these comments and raised concern that the Leader of the Council had not raised this issue with the Chief Executive personally in order for his concerns to be addressed. He referred to the winter months when the Director and Officers would have been unable to respond to letters/e-mails within 10 days due to the greater demand on the service and said that it would have been unfair to place an adverse notation on records at that time. He said that given the important issues facing the Council he would be supporting the amendment as put forward by Councillor Shotton.

Councillor A. Woolley, in response to Members comments said that all Members wanted to see an improvement and therefore proposed to defer the issue until the County Council meeting on 7th September, 2010. When put to the vote this proposal was lost.

Councillor A.P. Shotton put forward his amendment to the notice of motion which was 'That this Council adhere to the existing Communications Policy of responses to enquiries and calls on CMT to bring forward proposals to ensure compliance to that policy'. When put to the vote this was carried unanimously.

The Chief Executive thanked Members for their positive comments about officers and outlined the need to support staff by avoiding over criticism and asked Members to contact him if they had any areas of concern. He reported that work would continue to ensure the implementation of the proposals agreed at the Constitution Committee meeting held on 27th January, 2010.

RESOLVED

That the Council adhere to the existing Communications Policy of responses to enquiries and calls on the Corporate Management Team to bring forward proposals to ensure compliance to that policy.

22. DURATION OF MEETING

The meeting commenced at 2.00 p.m. and ended at 5.10 p.m.

23. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were two members of the press present.

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Chairman

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

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL	30TH JUNE, 2010
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MEMBER	ITEM	MIN. NO. REFERS
NONE WERE RECEIVED		