

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
25 NOVEMBER 2014

Minutes of the meeting of Flintshire County Council held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Mold on Tuesday, 25 November 2014

PRESENT: Councillor Glenys Diskin (Chair)

Councillors: Bernie Attridge, Glyn Banks, Haydn Bateman, Marion Bateman, Chris Bithell, Amanda Bragg, Helen Brown, Derek Butler, Clive Carver, David Cox, Paul Cunningham, Ron Davies, Adele Davies-Cooke, Alan Diskin, Rosetta Dolphin, Ian Dunbar, Andy Dunbobbin, Brian Dunn, Carol Ellis, David Evans, Jim Falshaw, Veronica Gay, Robin Guest, Alison Halford, Ron Hampson, George Hardcastle, Ray Hughes, Dennis Hutchinson, Hilary Isherwood, Joe Johnson, Christine Jones, Kevin Jones, Richard Jones, Colin Legg, Phil Lightfoot, Brian Lloyd, Richard Lloyd, Mike Lowe, Dave Mackie, Ann Minshull, Hilary McGuill, Tim Newhouse, Mike Peers, Vicky Perfect, Neville Phillips, Mike Reece, Gareth Roberts, Ian Roberts, David Roney, Aaron Shotton, Paul Shotton, Ian Smith, Nigel Steele-Mortimer, Carolyn Thomas, Owen Thomas, David Wisinger, and Arnold Woolley

APOLOGIES:

Councillors: Alex Aldridge, Peter Curtis, Chris Dolphin, Cindy Hinds, Rita Johnson, Stella Jones, Nancy Matthews, Billy Mullin, Tony Sharps, and Sharon Williams

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive, Chief Officer (People and Resources), Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise), Chief Officer (Organisational Change), Chief Officer (Social Services), Democracy & Governance Manager, Electoral Services Manager, and Committee Officer

62. PRESENTATIONS

The Chief Executive welcomed Melville Evans, Katie Clubb, Nicola Spencer and Julie Gorman from the Council's North East Wales (NEW) Homes Team. He praised the Team for their achievement as overall winner of the Welsh Housing Awards 2014 – New idea of the year category.

The Chief Executive explained that the Council was the first authority in Wales to set up its own housing company. Designed to respond to the challenges experienced by residents in accessing affordable housing, NEW Homes had been set up by the Council to increase the housing options available to local residents. The Company was providing accommodation to people on the affordable register who did not qualify for social housing but found it difficult to afford private rents.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Helen Brown congratulated the team on their hard work and success. She said it was a significant achievement for the Authority as well as New Homes.

Councillor Aaron Shotton reiterated the praise expressed by the Chief Executive and Cabinet Member and referred to national recognition of the innovative

approach taken by Flintshire County Council. He commented on a human right to have access to affordable housing and thanked all those involved in bringing an embryonic idea to fulfilment. He said this was a good success story and other authorities across Wales and the United Kingdom were following Flintshire's lead.

63. COUNCIL MINUTES

The draft minutes of the meeting held 22 October 2014 had been circulated to Members with the agenda.

Accuracy

Councillor Richard Jones referred to his comments on page 5, and asked that the word 'accurate' be replaced with 'improved' which was agreed.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the above amendment, the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

64. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Democracy and Governance Manager advised that Members who were members of the Fire Authority would need to declare a personal interest on Agenda Item 11 – Consultation on the level of Fire and Rescue Services by the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority Your Services, Your Choices. The following Members declared a personal interest:

Councillors Ian Dunbar, Brian Dunn, Hilary McGuill, Mike Reece, Paul Shotton, and Owen Thomas

The Democracy and Governance Manager advised that Members would also have a personal interest to declare in relation to Agenda Item 14 – Review of Polling District and Polling Places if they were on the management body for the proposed Polling Place. The following Members declared a personal interest:

Councillors Marion Bateman, Haydn Bateman, Chris Bithell, Helen Brown, Alan Diskin, Glenys Diskin, Carol Ellis, Veronica Gay, Robin Guest, Ray Hughes, Dennis Hutchinson, Dave Mackie, Neville Phillips, Mike Peers, and Nigel Steele-Mortimer

65. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

A copy of the Chair's communications had been circulated to all Members before the meeting.

The Chair referred to the fundraising event held on 21 November 2014, and reported that £500 had been raised for her chosen charities. She thanked Members for their support.

66. PETITIONS

The Chair confirmed that none had been received.

67. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair confirmed that none had been received.

68. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS ON COMMITTEE MINUTES

The Chair confirmed that none had been received.

69. NOTICE OF MOTION

The Chair confirmed that none had been received.

70. CONSULTATION ON THE LEVEL OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES BY THE NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY YOUR SERVICES, YOUR CHOICES

The Chief Executive presented the report for Council to determine its response to the consultation document of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service *Your Services, Your Choices*. He provided background information and advised that the consultation paper outlined three options for the future. The first was a continued 'freeze' in the Authority's annual budget; the second was a reduction in the Authority's annual budget at a level similar to the reductions being felt by the constituent councils themselves; the third was a gradual increase in the Authority's budget to protect services. Council was invited to review the options and provide feedback to the Fire Authority. The deadline for response to the consultation was 9 January 2015.

Councillor Aaron Shotton proposed the following hybrid option. The proposition was seconded by Councillor Bernie Attridge.

"That the Council shares the concerns of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority to protect both the preventative and responsive services as far as possible. The Council requests the Fire Authority to review further the scope for efficiency savings and reductions in non-statutory services expenditure to offset any increase in the levy to be met by the constituent North Wales Councils".

Councillor Shotton spoke of his concerns on the unprecedented financial challenges facing local government and acknowledged the financial pressures on the Fire Authority. He said there was a need to ensure that everything possible was done to find internal efficiencies and that one of the purposes of the informal Council session held on 9 September 2014 was for senior officers of the Fire and Rescue Service to demonstrate how the Fire Authority had maximised the opportunities for making cost efficiencies and to evidence that there was no scope for further efficiencies prior to reviewing station cover and 'front line' and preventative services. Councillor Shotton expressed the view that there was not sufficient evidence this had been exhausted. He suggested that the Fire Authority provided further information

regarding the internal efficiencies achieved and commented that it may be possible to gain further reductions in operational management.

Councillor Richard Jones spoke in support of the hybrid option but asked that the following additional wording be included in the proposition: "To be open to financial scrutiny and challenge towards maximising 'Value for Money' and reduction of overhead costs whilst providing the same or better level of protection to the residents of Flintshire". Councillor Shotton agreed that the additional wording could be incorporated. Councillor Jones also asked that the item be submitted for consideration by scrutiny before the budget was set by the Fire Authority.

Councillor Mike Peers supported the views expressed by Councillor Shotton. He referred to the Consultation document which was appended to the report and the examples of support services undertaken by staff 'behind the scenes'. He commented on the need to look "closely" at the cost of all services and consider if any opportunities existed for collaborative working.

Councillor Colin Legg emphasised the need not to pursue financial efficiencies to the detriment of protecting the services provided by the Fire Authority. He commented on the need to be prepared for any eventuality concerning fire and praised the role and responsibilities of firefighters who put their lives at risk when called upon to deal with serious events. Members concurred with the sentiments expressed by Councillor Legg in praise of firefighters.

Councillor Owen Thomas said the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority had already undertaken phases of efficiencies and cost reduction in recent years to avoid seeking increases in its levy. He referred to the valuable work undertaken by the Fire Authority to raise awareness and educate people about keeping safe and fire prevention, and the emergency response services. He said he would not wish to see a loss in any of those services.

Councillor Hilary Isherwood emphasised the importance of maintaining Fire Authority services in rural areas.

Councillor Hilary McGuill referred to the range of services provided by the Fire Authority as outlined in the consultation document. She commented on the assistance provided by the Fire Authority in response to road traffic collisions and said that other emergency services made a charge against insurance companies to recover their costs.

Members were asked to vote on the proposition put forward by Councillor Aaron Shotton incorporating the additional wording of Councillor Richard Jones. On being put to the vote the proposition was carried.

RESOLVED:

The Council shares the concerns of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority to protect both the preventative and responsive services as far as possible. The Council requests the Fire Authority to review further the scope for efficiency savings and reductions in non-statutory services expenditure, to be open to financial scrutiny

and challenge towards maximising 'Value for Money' and reduction of overhead costs whilst providing the same or better level of protection to the residents of Flintshire, to offset any increase in the levy to be met by the constituent North Wales Councils.

71. PROVISIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT SETTLEMENT CONSULTATION: A COUNCIL RESPONSE

The Chief Executive introduced a report to advise on an outline response to the consultation on the Local Government Provisional Settlement 2015/16. He reported that although the formal consultation period had closed additional comments would be taken into consideration with the Authority's response which had been endorsed by Cabinet on 18 November 2014. The Chief Executive advised that the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) was also preparing a response on behalf of the local government family. A copy of the response had been distributed to Members for consideration.

Councillor Alison Halford referred to the WLGA response and raised a question on the settlement for coming years. The Chief Executive responded that the Authority had no indication on the settlement for 2016/2017 onwards. He explained that the local government had been seeking indicative statements on settlements to be made available by the Welsh Government (WG) for sometime to enable local authorities to plan with a degree of certainty. He commented that the Authority was placed in a difficult position as it was only able to plan one year ahead. The Chief Executive commented on the impact of reductions in specific grants for core services which added to the primary impact of the major reduction in the Revenue Support Grant.

Councillor Aaron Shotton referred to the outline response to the consultation on the Local Government Provisional Settlement which was detailed in the report and commented on the shared concerns across all political groups on the settlement. He expressed the need for unified support and proposed that the Council endorse the Cabinet response as set out in Section 3 of the report, and also support as part of the Council's representations the WLGA response to the consultation. The proposition was seconded.

Referring to the amount of the reduction in central funding from the WG, Councillor Shotton commented that the cuts were so significant it put the viability of a sustainable local government in question.

Councillor Aaron Shotton asked Members to take note of discussions at national level and referred to the call in England and Scotland for the devolution of business rates. He commented on the significant amount of NNDR rates that the Authority had collected on behalf of the WG last year and said that a share of the NNDR funds should be retained by local authorities. He also referred to the need for more local flexibility and freedoms in funding and specific grants and for a debate to be had at national level on what the priorities were going forward with reduced budgets.

Councillor Derek Butler supported the views expressed by the Leader and commented on the issues concerning late notification of specific grants. He reiterated the need for a share of the business rates to be retained by local authorities in Wales.

Councillor Robin Guest suggested that the meeting be adjourned so that Members could be given the opportunity to consider the WLGA response.

The Chair announced that there would be a 5 minute adjournment to allow Members to read the WLGA response.

Following the adjournment Councillor Guest said that the WLGA response had set out the main considerations on behalf of local government and had made the point that the approach to public sector funding did not apply equally across the sector. He cited the increased funding for the Health Boards in Wales as an example and expressed concern that the savings achieved through cuts in local government funding were being used to fund the health service.

Councillor Mike Peers commented on the level of dissatisfaction amongst local authorities in Wales concerning WG financial planning. He suggested that the WG be asked to review their own position to consider where efficiencies could be achieved.

Councillor Carol Ellis reiterated the concerns expressed by Councillor Guest around funding for the Health service and commented that increased funding had not resulted in improved services and cited increased waiting times and cancellation of operations as an example. She emphasised that local government services prevented hospital admissions and kept people out of the NHS. She expressed concerns that the cuts in funding would mean other services would be permanently lost and only limited social services and education could be provided in the future.

Councillor Aaron Shotton commented on critical national persuasion and said that all parties needed to be united in recognising the importance of retaining local government and the sustainability of public services in Wales. Members concurred with the views expressed by the Leader.

RESOLVED:

That the Council endorsed the Cabinet response as set out in Section 3 of the report, and also supported and endorsed as part of the Council's representations the WLGA response to the consultation.

72. REFORM OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE PUBLIC SERVICES

The Chief Executive provided an update on the Welsh Government consultation on the reform of local government and the public services. Referring to the Williams Commission he advised that the deadline for local authorities to express an interest to the Minister in a voluntary merger was 28 November 2014.

The Chief Executive referred to the WG 'prospectus' for 'early adopters' which detailed the process and incentives for councils who wished to submit a business case in favour of a voluntary merger. He reminded members that at the meeting of the Council on 22 October 2014, it had been agreed to explore an early adoption merger of Flintshire County Council and Wrexham County Borough Council, however, Wrexham Council had subsequently declined to pursue a voluntary merger with Flintshire, a decision Flintshire had to respect and accept at this stage. He referred to the local authorities who were thought likely to express an interest and advised that 7 local authorities had indicated that they had no interest in pursuing a voluntary merger at this moment in time, whereas six appeared to have an interest..

Councillor Aaron Shotton reported that the Council had written to seek an urgent meeting with the Welsh Government Minister for Local Government and the Minister for Finance to discuss the availability of transitional finance, support, and the long term funding strategy to assist the Council in protecting local government services in return for an early merger with Wrexham County Borough Council. Whilst the Authority was still willing to discuss and explore the opportunity of a voluntary merger with Wrexham Council, Councillor Shotton said there was a strong debate to be had around the costs of re-organisation and where the funding would come from to meet those costs. He cited as an example the contributory costs of redundancies, pay and grading, system changes, property, assets, accommodation, taxation, He commented that the costs for local government reorganisation across Wales had been estimated at between £160m - £268m which were higher than the figures indicated in the Williams Commission. Councillor Shotton referred to the indicative cost of £10m for a merger between Flintshire County Council and Wrexham County Borough Council which had a WG timeline of 2020. He said that until the Authority had a clear understanding of the real costs associated with a merger with Wrexham Council it could not see sufficiently the specific benefits. Whilst acknowledging that there were possible benefits to a merger there were also risks.

Councillor Shotton referred to discussions which were beginning to take place with some authorities in Wales around changes to existing council boundaries. Councillor Shotton commented on information that the Minister was possibly proposing to reduce the number of local authorities in Wales to 6, which was a change from the 12 authorities recommended in the Williams Commission. He stressed the need for the Authority to be involved in discussions concerning reviews of existing Council boundaries.

Councillor Shotton proposed that the Council writes to the Welsh Government Minister before 28 November 2014, to restate the Council's position concerning the opening of discussions with Wrexham County Borough Council for a voluntary merger, and request that if discussion takes place during the consultation concerning reviews of existing Council boundaries, that the Council be involved in those discussions with the North Wales local authorities. The proposal was seconded and agreed by Members.

RESOLVED:

That the Council writes to the Welsh Government Minister before 28 November 2014, to restate the Council's position of being open to discussions with Wrexham County

Borough Council for a voluntary merger, and request that if discussion takes place during the consultation concerning reviews of existing Council boundaries that the Council be involved in those discussions with the North Wales authorities.

73. REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

The Chief Executive introduced a report on the outcome of the recent review of polling districts and polling places and to agree a number of changes. He provided background information and referred to the responses received during the consultation process. He reported that various issues had been raised during the consultation and a number of proposals had been identified for consideration which were appended to the report.

Councillor Marion Bateman referred to the polling place in her Ward at Sychdyn and requested that the polling booths be placed in a different room.

Councillor Richard Lloyd confirmed that the Saltney Ferry Scout and Guide Hut, Bradshaw Avenue, would be available for use as a polling place. He also confirmed that disabled access was available at the building.

Councillor Ron Davies referred to the polling place at the Community Centre in Shotton and suggested that one of the entrances be improved for disabled access.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the outcome of the review and the consultations undertaken be noted;
- (b) That the Council designates the locations listed in appendix 3 as polling places;
- (c) That the Council agrees to look at the suggested alternative polling places for BJA2, PAA1 and PAA2;
- (d) That the Council agrees to improve access arrangements for BJA2 and EAA2; and
- (e) That the outcome of the review and the Council's decision be published in addition to other information as is prescribed in the Act and Regulations.

74. REVIEW OF MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT

The Democracy and Governance Manager introduced a report which sought approval for minor revisions to the Members' Code of Conduct recommended by the Council's Constitution Committee. He provided background information and advised that the proposed changes to update or clarify the existing wording to the Code of Conduct were shown as tracked changes in the appendix to the report for Members' consideration.

Councillor Mike Peers suggested that the date on the title page of the Members' Code of Conduct should be amended to reflect that the document had been updated from 25 November 2014.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That with the addition suggested by Councillor Peers, the revised Members' Code of Conduct as shown in Appendix 1 be approved; and
- (b) That the Council complies with the requirements of Section 51 of the Local Government Act 2000

75. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00pm and ended at 4.05pm)

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Chair