

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
15th NOVEMBER 2016

Minutes of the meeting of Flintshire County Council held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Mold on Tuesday, 15th November 2016

PRESENT: Councillor Peter Curtis (Chairman)

Councillors: Bernie Attridge, Glyn Banks, Marion Bateman, Haydn Bateman, Helen Brown, Derek Butler, Clive Carver, David Cox, Paul Cunningham, Ron Davies, Adele Davies-Cooke, Alan Diskin, Glenys Diskin, Ian Dunbar, Andy Dunbobbin, Brian Dunn, David Evans, Veronica Gay, Robin Guest, Ron Hampson, George Hardcastle, David Healey, Cindy Hinds, Ray Hughes, Joe Johnson, Rita Johnson, Christine Jones, Kevin Jones, Richard Jones, Brian Lloyd, Richard Lloyd, Mike Lowe, Dave Mackie, Nancy Matthews, Hilary McGuill, Ann Minshull, Billy Mullin, Mike Peers, Neville Phillips, Gareth Roberts, Ian Roberts, David Roney, Aaron Shotton, Paul Shotton, Ian Smith, Nigel Steele-Mortimer, Carolyn Thomas, David Williams, David Wisinger, Arnold Woolley, and Matt Wright

APOLOGIES:

Councillors: Alex Aldridge, Chris Bithell, Chris Dolphin, Rosetta Dolphin, Carol Ellis, Jim Falshaw, Alison Halford, Dennis Hutchinson, Hilary Isherwood, Colin Legg, Phil Lightfoot, Tim Newhouse, Sara Parker, Vicky Perfect, Mike Reece, Tony Sharps, Owen Thomas and Sharon Williams.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Governance), Chief Officer (Organisational Change 1), Chief Officer (Organisational Change 2), Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise), Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation), Chief Officer (Social Services), Chief Officer (Education & Youth), Corporate Finance Manager, Finance Manager (Technical Accountancy), Finance Manager, and Committee Officers

57. PRESENTATIONS

Recognition of RIO Paralympics success

The Chief Executive introduced and welcomed Sabrina Fortune and Beverley Jones. He commented on the success of the RIO Paralympic 2016 games and the outstanding achievements which had been gained by paralympic athletes. He gave background information and said that Great Britain had achieved a total of 147 medals in the Games including 64 Gold and 1 Bronze. The Chief Executive paid tribute to the outstanding achievements and invited the Chairman to express his congratulations.

The Chairman reported that Beverley was a seasoned athlete and that Rio was her fifth consecutive Games. Her paralympic achievements had started in Sydney in 2000 and she competed in Athens in 2004, Beijing 2008, and had won Bronze in London 2012. During the Paralympic Games in Rio, Beverley had finished fifth in the Women's Discus Throw F37/38.

The Chairman advised that Sabrina was a former Argoed High School pupil. Rio 2016 was Sabrina's first Paralympics Games and she achieved a personal best of 12.94m in the Women's F20 Shot Putt which had secured her a Bronze medal. Sabrina was the first Welsh Athlete to win a medal and now had her sights set on Tokyo 2020.

The Chairman expressed his admiration and thanks to Beverley and Sabina for their achievements on behalf of Wales and Flintshire.

Councillor Hilary McGuill said both athletes were excellent ambassadors for disability sports and congratulated them on their personal achievements. She commented on the work Beverley and Sabrina had undertaken in local schools to inspire and encourage the younger generation and thanked them for their support.

Councillor Kevin Jones also paid tribute to Beverley and Sabrina for the achievements they had gained on behalf of their families, Flintshire, Wales, and all paralympians. He thanked them for their attendance and wished them well in their future aspirations.

Councillor Ron Davies reiterated the sentiments which had been expressed by Members and spoke of the associated pride of local residents in the Shotton Ward.

58. COUNCIL MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th October 2016 had been circulated with the agenda.

Accuracy

The following Members stated that they were present at the meeting but their attendance had been recorded under apologies: Councillors Robin Guest, Richard Jones, and Nigel Steele-Mortimer.

Councillor Mike Peers referred to his request on page 10 that the call in meeting which related to car park changes could be included within the Annual Report and said the date of the call in meeting was 14 May 2015 not 2016 as stated.

Matters arising

Councillor Hilary McGuill said she had not yet had a response to her question on page 9 concerning whether the Council had any consultants which were incentive led. The Chief Officer (Governance) advised that the Procurement Service was compiling the information required and apologised that it had not been provided yet. He explained that it was being progressed and that he would chase the matter further. The Chief Executive advised that it was the exception rather than the rule for consultants to be incentive-led in Flintshire and said it was normally flat fee based work on a task and finish basis.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the above amendments, the minutes be approved as a correct record.

59. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

60. PETITIONS

The Chief Officer (Governance) advised that none had been received.

61. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chief Officer (Governance) advised that none had been received.

62. QUESTIONS

The Chief Officer (Governance) advised that none had been received.

63. NOTICE OF MOTION

The Chief Officer (Governance) advised that none had been received.

64. WELSH LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROVISIONAL SETTLEMENT 2017/18

The Chief Executive introduced the report to provide a summary of the Provisional Welsh Local Government Financial Settlement announced as part of the Welsh Government budget for 2017/18. He advised that the figures were provisional at this stage and the Final Settlement was expected on 21 December 2016. Consultation on the provisional settlement was open until 30 November 2016. The Chief Executive explained that he and the Leader would produce a formal response to the Welsh Government (WG) on the Provisional Settlement consultation.

The Chief Executive provided background information and context and commented on the slight increase in funding which had been made to the Welsh Government budget and the significant priority and investment which had been given to the NHS in Wales which included funding for winter pressures and additional funding to support the Health Boards in deficit. He also commented on the Council's campaign for an improved settlement than that forecasted and had pressed for a 'flat line' or 'cash flat' settlement for 2017/18 with no reduction in core grant, and the collective local government case on cost pressures with specific emphasis on social services. He reported that Welsh Government Ministers had listened to the cases put forward and there had been some positive improvement to the Settlement, however, the pressures continued in social care and workforce costs.

The Chief Executive gave a presentation which covered the following areas:

- Welsh Government Budget
- State of the Nation

- Local Impacts of the Settlement
- The Flintshire Case
- Responding to the Consultation

Councillor Aaron Shotton thanked the Chief Executive for his presentation and the information on the impacts of the draft provisional local government settlement. He said the purpose was to keep Members fully informed of the impact of the Settlement and to formulate the Council's consultation response to Welsh Government (WG). He took the opportunity to thank all Members, Council employees, and members of the community who had given their assistance and support to the lobbying case for funding to the WG. He spoke of the Council's consistent and resolute stance in not accepting austerity and passport cuts year on year to front line services. He advised that service business plans were now 'maxed out' in terms of the efficiencies that could be found and therefore the broadly 'flat lined' Settlement which had brought some improvement to Flintshire's forecasted position was welcomed and to be acknowledged in the consultation response. Councillor Shotton emphasised the need for the Council to continue to be consistent in its 'asks' to the WG for assistance specifically social care.

Councillor Shotton thanked Members for their attendance at the recent public engagement events which had been held across Flintshire and spoke of the public responses which had indicated support for the Council's lobbying case to both the National and Welsh Government for some relief to protect front line services and a change in the national fiscal policy. He commented on the need for a fair funding formula and said that whilst Flintshire had the 6th largest population in Wales it was 19th out of 22 local authorities in terms of its funding position by the WG. He continued that Flintshire was a low funded Council per capita. He asked Members to support the proposals and feed any further concerns they had into the final consultation response to the WG.

Councillor Kevin Jones referred to the Single Environment Grant. He explained that during a recent meeting with the Minister and Welsh Local Government Association he had been informed that there would be a 6.7% to 6.8% reduction in the grant. He explained that the grant, which had previously been the Waste Management Strategic Grant, had suffered significant cuts for a number of years and he had previously expressed fears that failure to incorporate the grant within the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) would leave it susceptible to further cuts. He said he had been particularly concerned that it had been announced as a Single Environment Grant. He explained that a number of areas of work which had previously been undertaken by the Environment Agency and had since been incorporated into a new body, had left a number of elements of work to be passported to local authorities. At a further meeting he had been informed of proposed further reductions (50%) to section environment grants and waste management grants and that from next year any capital that may be available for grant aid from the WG would be concentrated on flood risk management. He commented on the significant cost of flood management and schemes and said that the majority of funding available would be used for this purpose and leave little to continue the work for waste management and recycling charges. He advised that Flintshire had made good progress on waste and recycling management and commented on the efficiencies, improvements, and continued investment that had been achieved in the service to date. He asked that his concerns around any further

proposed cuts in funding to the grant be included in the consultation response to the Welsh Government.

Councillor Mike Peers concurred with the views expressed by Councillor Aaron Shotton concerning the disparity between what local authorities received under the current funding formula system for local government. He also commented on the need to question how the WG managed its funding from national government and whether some capital/infrastructure plans could be deferred in view of the present levels of austerity being imposed on local government.

Councillor Richard Jones emphasised that although Flintshire had received a 0.1% increase in the Provisional Settlement this was the Welsh average, and expressed the view that the WG had not yet accepted the case that Flintshire was a low funded Council. He commented on the amount of funding which had been passported by the WG to support the NHS. The Chief Executive commented that the Council had achieved the objective of a 'flat-line' Settlement, and on the need to continue to lobby the case on the funding formula and how it was distributed to local government.

Councillor Gareth Roberts suggested that the Council might wish to consider the merits of introducing a scheme of local income tax which he felt was a fairer system of raising local government funding and would be simpler to implement.

Councillor Paul Shotton commented on the impact of the Settlement on the Communities First programme. He suggested that the work of the Communities First team be recognised by the Council and spoke of the help and support given by Communities First to entrepreneurial projects.

The Chief Executive advised that the written response to the consultation which would be produced by himself and the Leader, would be shared with Members for reference.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Provisional Settlement be noted;
- (b) That the impact on the budget for 2017/18, as set out in the agenda item on the Council Fund Budget 2017/18 - Stage 1 and 2, be noted; and
- (c) That the comments raised by Members be included in the Council response to the WG on the Provisional Settlement consultation.

65. COUNCIL FUND BUDGET 2017/18 – Stages 1 and 2

The Corporate Finance Manager introduced the report to provide an update on planning the 2017/18 Council Fund Budget and closing the significant 'gap', to recommend for adoption the Service Portfolio Business Plan proposals for 2017/18, and to seek endorsement on the Corporate Financial Stewardship proposals for review

by the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny on 30 November 2016 prior to submission to County Council on 6 December 2016 for formal approval.

The Chief Executive commented on the clear and purposeful three year financial strategy and gave a joint presentation with the Corporate Finance Manager which covered the following areas:

- the on-going strategy
- critical point for Flintshire
- the projected 'budget gap' 2017/18
- where we left off in September
- Service portfolio Business Plans – Part 1
 - service reform – business plans
 - final changes to proposals
- Corporate financial stewardship - Part 2
 - conclusions of work to date
 - new and emerging pressures
 - ongoing work
- working with Welsh Government – Part 3
 - key national discussion points
 - impact of the provisional settlement
 - Domiciliary Care – charging levels
 - summary of overall budget position
- budget closing stages
- the medium term

Councillor Aaron Shotton formally moved the recommendations to the report and thanked the Chief Executive and Corporate Finance Manager for their comprehensive overview of Stage 1 of the budget proposals. He referred to the recommendation to endorse the strategy for Stage 2 of the budget and advised that a number of further corporate finance options to close the budget gap had been agreed at the meeting of Cabinet which had been held prior to County Council this afternoon. He said these proposals would be subject to further scrutiny at the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny meeting on 30 November 2016.

Councillor Shotton also spoke of the need to protect frontline services against the impacts of austerity. He commented on the further work to be done to bridge the 'gap' and set a balanced budget and took the opportunity give an assurance to Members, residents of Flintshire and service users, that the Council did not intend to bring forward any further proposals which would effect its services.

Councillor Richard Jones thanked the Chief Executive for his clarification during the presentation around the information provided on equalities impact assessments/statements received. However, he expressed concern that the information which Members had requested was a report on the consequences of the efficiencies and decisions that had been made regarding front line services. He raised a number of concerns around the level of efficiencies to be achieved, the financial process, and the information which had been provided so far.

In response to the concerns raised by Councillor Jones the Chief Executive advised that a commitment had been given to look at what impact assessment work was available and this had been shared with Members. He also explained that Members had been advised that if they had concerns regarding any specific budget proposals they would be provided with information in response to those enquiries, however, there had been no such requests as far as he was aware. Regarding the concern that the Council should be aiming for a higher level of efficiencies the Chief Executive emphasised that there were no further efficiencies to be found in the business plans and reiterated that it had been previously agreed with Members that the business plans were now 'maxed out'.

Councillor Mike Peers endorsed the views expressed by Councillor Richard Jones and said there was a need for Members to be provided with a report on the consequences of the efficiencies proposed to services. Referring to page 46 of the report, Councillor Peers asked for an explanation of the information provided in paragraph 1.27 regarding the £0.400m lower funding for the primary sector. He raised further concerns around pressures and commented on the need and the cost to comply with the new Welsh Language Standards. He suggested that as the Welsh Government had introduced and required that the Council be compliant with the Standards it should be asked to provide the funding to meet the need. He also asked for further explanation to be provided relating to the electricity generated on solar farm sites, the car parking strategy and car parking charges. Officers responded in detail to the questions raised.

Councillor Robin Guest referred to the additional information which had been requested by members of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee. He said it was the detail of what the consequences of the amendments to the budget and reductions in services would be, that was required. In addition an explanation of why the figures had changed from previous years was requested. He sought an assurance that the information requested by the members of the Committee would be provided before the next meeting on 30 November 2016. The Chief Executive agreed that the further information requested on consequences and mitigation would be provided to all Members for the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 30 November 2016. He asked that Members forward any additional questions to the Corporate Finance Manager in advance of the meeting.

Councillor Richard Jones proposed an amendment to the recommendation to approve Stage 1 of the Budget proposals. He proposed that approval be provisional pending acceptance of the additional information to be provided to Members at the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 30 November 2016. Members were asked to vote on the amendment and when put to the vote the amendment was lost.

Councillor Aaron Shotton acknowledged the request from Members for further information and assurance, however, he emphasised the need to progress and deliver the proposed efficiencies as early as possible. Commenting on the question concerning the Education budget which had been raised by Councillor Peers, Councillor Shotton gave an assurance that the Council would do its utmost to protect and increase schools budgets as much as possible.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Stage 1 budget proposals for 2017/18 be approved; and
- (b) That the strategy for Stage 2 of the budget for referral to Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny prior to presentation to Council on 6 December 2016, be endorsed.

66. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press and no members of the public present.

(The meeting started at 2.00pm and ended at 3.55pm)

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Chairman