

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
6 DECEMBER 2016

Minutes of the meeting of Flintshire County Council held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Mold on Tuesday, 6 December 2016

PRESENT: Councillor Peter Curtis (Chairman)

Councillors: Bernie Attridge, Glyn Banks, Haydn Bateman, Marion Bateman, Chris Bithell, Derek Butler, Clive Carver, David Cox, Paul Cunningham, Ron Davies, Alan Diskin, Glenys Diskin, Chris Dolphin, Ian Dunbar, Andy Dunbobbin, David Evans, Veronica Gay, Robin Guest, David Healey, Cindy Hinds, Ray Hughes, Dennis Hutchinson, Hilary Isherwood, Joe Johnson, Christine Jones, Kevin Jones, Richard Jones, Colin Legg, Brian Lloyd, Richard Lloyd, Mike Lowe, Dave Mackie, Nancy Matthews, Billy Mullin, Sara Parker, Mike Peers, Vicky Perfect, Neville Phillips, Gareth Roberts, Ian Roberts, David Roney, Tony Sharps, Aaron Shotton, Paul Shotton, Ian Smith, Nigel Steele-Mortimer, Carolyn Thomas, Owen Thomas, David Williams, David Wisinger, and Arnold Woolley

APOLOGIES:

Councillors: Alex Aldridge, Adele Davies-Cooke, Rosetta Dolphin, Carol Ellis, Jim Falshaw, Alison Halford, George Hardcastle, Rita Johnson, Phil Lightfoot, Hilary McGuill, Ann Minshull, Mike Reece, and Sharon Williams.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Governance), Chief Officer (Organisational Change 2), Corporate Finance Manager, Finance Manager (Technical Accountancy), Finance Manager, Senior Manager Safeguarding and Commissioning, Revenues Manager, Waste Services Manager, Senior Manager Business Change and Support, and Committee Officers

Prior to the start of the meeting the Chairman announced that it was with regret he had to inform Members that Councillor Jim Falshaw had resigned as a County Councillor with effect from 31 December 2016, due to ill health. The Chairman would write to Councillor Falshaw on behalf of Members to thank him for his years of service and dedication as a Councillor and to wish him a good recovery.

Councillors Clive Carver and Tony Sharps paid tribute to Councillor Falshaw and expressed their appreciation for his hard work and commitment. Councillor Sharps added that his presence and contribution at County Hall would be missed and wished him well for the future.

67. COUNCIL MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 15th November 2016 had been circulated with the agenda.

Accuracy

Councillor Mike Peers referred to his comments on page 7, paragraph 1, and asked that the words Welsh Government be inserted prior to the words 'capital/infrastructure plans' to provide clarification of his point.

Councillor Gareth Roberts referred to his comments on page 7, third paragraph, and asked that the word 'simpler' be changed to 'simple'.

Matters arising

Council Fund Budget 2017/18 – Stages 1 and 2

Councillor Mike Peers referred to his suggestion on page 9, second paragraph, and asked if the Welsh Government (WG) had been asked if funding could be provided for the Council to be compliant with the Welsh Language Standards.

The Chief Executive explained that local government had collectively pressed for funding before the Standards were introduced but none had been provided. He advised that the Council had not yet finalised the Welsh Language Standards for Flintshire. A meeting was scheduled to be held with the Welsh Language Commission shortly. When the total cost was known the Council would then be in a position, collectively with other Councils, to request that discussions with WG be reopened on future funding.

Councillor Nancy Matthews commented on the process on Stage 1 of the budget proposals, and said there was a need to be mindful of the requests made by Members for more detailed information and that it should be provided in time for sufficient consideration to be given.

Councillor Richard Jones referred to his comments on page 9 in relation to the Stage 1 business plan proposals. He said there were a number of reasons why the proposals could not be accepted and explained that page 4 of the Stage 1 business plan proposals was missing from the papers for the meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 19 July 2016. At the meeting of the Social & Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 21 July 2016 the Stage 1 business plan proposals were not provided. A request for the consequences document at the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 28 September 2016 was not provided until 28 November 2016 (one and half days prior to the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 30 November 2016). Councillor Jones said that not all Members had been given the opportunity to ask their questions at Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Although Stage 1 business plan proposals were approved by Council at the meeting held on 15 November 2016 there were changes in proposal descriptions that had been made later. He said that the consultation was lacking in clarity and transparency.

RESOLVED:

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

68. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

69. PETITIONS

Councillor Carolyn Thomas presented a petition on behalf of local residents to support the public bus service from Mold to Wrexham through the villages of Cymau, Llanfynydd, Treuddyn and Nercwys.

In response to the concerns expressed by Councillor Thomas, Councillor Bernie Attridge gave an assurance that the Council had no plans to remove any bus services for the duration of the current administration in place until May 2017.

The Chief Executive gave an update and explained that the Council was maintaining the bus services at its own financial risk in-year and was awaiting a decision from the WG on interim funding.

70. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

71. QUESTIONS

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

72. NOTICE OF MOTION

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

73. 2017/18 COUNCIL FUND BUDGET STAGE 2

The Chief Executive introduced the report to present the Corporate Financial Stewardship Proposals (Part 2 of the Strategy) for approval. He advised that the proposals had been considered, and recommended at the meeting of Cabinet which had been held prior to the meeting of County Council this afternoon, and following consideration by the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 30 November 2016.

The Chief Executive provided background information and context and outlined the further work to be done to close the 'budget gap' and conclude the budget proposals for 2017/18. The Chief Executive, Corporate Finance Manager, and Finance Manager, Technical and Accountancy, gave a joint presentation which covered the following areas:

- the forecast 'Budget Gap' 2017/18
- where the Council had 'left off' in November
- Corporate financial stewardship proposals

- Apprentice Tax Levy
- central loans and investment account
- summary of overall budget position
- Domiciliary care cap review
- Corporate financial stewardship – ongoing work
- final stages of 2017/18 budget setting

Councillor Aaron Shotton thanked the Chief Executive, and Corporate Finance Manager and his Team, for their presentation and work on the Stage 2 budget proposals. He was grateful that Officers had not brought forward a request for cuts to be made to services but had found innovative solutions in corporate financing and over how the Council would meet its revenue provision for borrowing and debt.

Councillor Shotton advised that Cabinet, at a meeting which had been held prior to the meeting of the Council this afternoon, had endorsed to Council a final set of detailed proposals for Stage 2 of the budget and he moved the recommendation in the report. The proposal was seconded. Councillor Shotton said he supported the incremental approach to setting the budget and commented that Members had been given more opportunity this year than previously to engage with and discuss elements within the budget process. He sought support from Members for the resolute approach which had been taken in Flintshire to protect services from cuts, despite reduced government funding and austerity, which was different to the stance adopted in other local authorities.

Councillor Shotton spoke of the commitment within the budget this year to provide a 1.3% increase in the school budget. He commented on the further work to be done to set a legal balanced budget and to continue lobbying of the Welsh Government for recognition and support of the Council's low funding position with specific emphasis on social services care pressures. Councillor Shotton gave a commitment that in leading to a balanced budget the Council would not bring forward any proposals for cuts to services

In response to the comments made by Councillor Nigel Steel Mortimer concerning the annual Minimum Revenue Provision charge and his suggestion for further savings to be achieved through consideration of the third option, the Chief Executive advised that the annuity method was not appropriate for historic debt but might be appropriate for selective future borrowing. The Finance Manager, Technical Accountancy, acknowledged that whilst the suggestion put forward was more affordable in the short term it would not be considered more prudent or sustainable in the long term and explained the reasons why the annuity method was not recommended as the way forward. The Chief Executive explained that following extensive discussion with the Council's advisors and the Wales Audit Office all were clear that the recommended method was the most appropriate.

Councillor Mike Peers asked that figures which are presented as part of the balancing of the budget are robust and realistic. He also commented on the reference made by the Corporate Finance Manager to in-year pressures and reserves and explained why he would like to explore this further. The Chief Executive acknowledged the point raised and gave an assurance that Officers were not complacent that any overspends in-year could be mitigated by reserves. He

commented on the contingency reserve which was created specifically to give in-year protection against risk and said it was used correctly, however, the point about the scale of risk was acknowledged. The Chief Executive also responded to the comments made by Councillor Peers about estimated figures and explained that the figures presented had been reasonably stable for several months, with some small variations, and that some cost pressures were beyond the Council's control. He commented on the solid budget process and the importance of the rigour, transparency and scrutiny which had taken place to date. The Corporate Finance Manager clarified that his reference had been to a small reserve for unforeseen events in year.

Councillor Robin Guest referred to the annuity method for future borrowing and asked if the Council would need to make a formal decision on this in the future or if a decision was made on a case by case basis as borrowing was made. He also referred to the figures in the report concerning the Apprenticeship Levy and sought clarification of the figure which would be taken from reserves. Responding to the question on the Apprenticeship Levy the Chief Executive said that it was recommended that £699k be taken from reserves. The Corporate Finance Manager advised that the Council would be asked to formally approve the principles and changes to the Minimum Revenue Provision for budget purposes today and then case by case as appropriate going forward.

RESOLVED:

That the Stage 2 budget proposals for 2017/18 be approved.

74. LOCAL DEMOCRACY AND BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR WALES (LDBCW) ELECTORAL REVIEW – POLICY AND PRACTICE

The Chief Officer (Governance) provided background information to the report. He advised that in June 2016 the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government published a Written Statement asking the Commission to restart its 10 year electoral review programme with a new prioritised timetable. The Cabinet Secretary requested that all 22 electoral reviews be completed in time for the new arrangements to be put in place for the 2022 Local Government Elections.

The Chief Officer explained that the Commission had adopted consistent methodology and principles to determine the number of elected members which were appropriate for each Council and this was detailed in appendix 2 of the report. It was also intended to carry out a periodic electoral review of every Council to ensure ward boundaries were correct in terms of past and proposed development. The Chief Officer informed that the councillor to population ratio in Flintshire was 1:3000 and the 'target' number of councillors determined for Flintshire was 63. The Commission's review of the County of Flintshire would commence in Quarter 4, 2018, and conclude in Quarter 2, 2020. The Chief Officer explained that the Council and Councillors would have the opportunity to feed into the review whilst it was underway and to comment on proposals before they were finalised.

The Chief Executive commented that this was the first formal recognition of the Minister’s commitment for current Councils to have at least 10 years of renewed terms. There would be a full review process with ample opportunity for comment and for the principles to be tested to follow.

Councillor Billy Mullin moved the recommendation in the report which was duly seconded.

Councillor Gareth Roberts commented on the concerns which had been raised following previous consideration of the boundary commission review around how the ratio of 1:3000 was determined.

Councillor Owen Thomas expressed concerns regarding the proposed size of boundaries and the increase in workload for Councillors as a result.

RESOLVED:

That the revised Policy and Practice Document and the timing of the review for the County of Flintshire, as stated above, be noted.

75. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press and twelve members of the public present.

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

.....

Chairman