
THE COUNCIL 02.04.09

Present: Councillor Evie Morgan Jones (Chairman)
Councillor Anne Lloyd Jones (Vice-chair)

Councillors: Stephen Churchman, Anwen Davies, E T Dogan, Dyfed Edwards, Dylan Edwards, Elwyn Edwards, Huw Edwards, T G Ellis, Alan Jones Evans, Alun Wyn Evans, Jean Forsyth, Simon Glyn, Keith Greenly-Jones, Margaret Griffith, Selwyn Griffiths, Alwyn Gruffydd, Siân Gwenllïan, Christopher Hughes, Dafydd Ll Hughes, Huw Hughes, Louise Hughes, Sylvia Humphreys, Aeron M Jones, Brian Jones, Charles Wyn Jones, Dai Rees Jones, Eric Merfyn Jones, R L Jones, W Penri Jones, P.G.Larsen, Dewi Lewis, Dewi Llewelyn, Dilwyn Lloyd, June Marshall, Keith Marshall, J Wynn Meredith, Llinos Merks, Linda Morgan, Dewi Owen, W Tudor Owen, Arwel Pierce, Peter Read, Caerwyn Roberts, Glyn Roberts, Ieuan Roberts, John Pughe Roberts, Liz Saville Roberts, Siôn Selwyn Roberts, Gareth Roberts, Dyfrig Siencyn, Ioan Thomas, Guto Rhys Tomos, Ann Williams, Gethin Glyn Williams, Gwilym Williams, J.W.Williams, Owain Williams, R H Wyn Williams and Robert J Wright.

Also present: Harry Thomas (Chief Executive), Dilwyn Williams (Corporate Director), Iwan Trefor Jones (Corporate Director), Dafydd Lewis (Corporate Director), Dafydd Edwards (Head of Finance), Dilys Phillips (Monitoring Officer/Head of Democracy and Legal Department), Geraint George (Head of Strategic and Improvement Department), Iwan Evans (Legal Services Manager), Dewi Jones (Head of Education), Ffrancon Williams (Head of Housing Stock Ballot Project), Arwel Ellis Jones (Senior Performance and Scrutiny Manager), Seimon Williams (Schools Organisation Project Manager) and Eleri Parry (Senior Committee Officer)

Apologies: Councillors Trevor Edwards, Gwen Griffith, O P Huws, Dyfrig Jones, John Gwilym Jones, J R Jones, John Wynn Jones, Linda Wyn Jones, Eryl Jones-Williams, W Roy Owen, Dafydd Roberts, Gwilym Euros Roberts and Trevor Roberts

1 PRAYER

The meeting was opened with a prayer from Councillor Huw Edwards.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

- (a) Distributed to members, prior to the committee - a guidance note by the Monitoring Officer regarding two issues before the Council, namely Reorganising the County's Primary Schools and the Housing Stock Ballot Project.

The note reminded members of the requirements of the Code of Conduct, emphasising that it was the members' personal responsibility to declare interests, and asked members who were uncertain regarding their position to discuss the issue with the Monitoring Officer prior to the meeting.

Reorganising Primary Schools

The Monitoring Officer explained:-

- (i) that every member who represented the Council on a primary school governing body was entitled to participate in full in the discussion and vote under the Code of Conduct;
- (ii) that a member would have a personal interest should the decision on the matter in question be likely to affect the interests or financial position of a person with whom a member had a close personal connection - as a pupil or as an employee at a school.

That interest would prevent a member from participating in the discussion should it be reasonable for a member of the public to regard as so significant that it would prejudice the members' judgement;

- (iii) as the report related to a strategy and order of catchment areas, not specific schools, it was reasonable to conclude that it was not a prejudicial interest;
- (iv) that the situation would change when specific schools would be discussed and members should be cautious at that time.

Members were reminded of their right to submit a request for a dispensation to the Standards Committee.

Housing Stock Ballot

The Monitoring Officer explained that members who had been nominated by the Council to the Shadow Board should declare an interest, but that they were entitled, under the Code of Conduct, to participate in full in the discussion and vote.

In addition, any member who was a Council tenant should declare an interest, but they were entitled under an exemption in the Code of Conduct, to participate in full in the discussion and vote (provided that they did not have rent arrears in excess of two months).

- (b) The members who were primary school governors declared an interest in the item Reorganising the County's Primary Schools, however, every member who represented the Council on a primary school governing body was entitled to participate in full in the discussion and vote under the Code of Conduct.
- (c) The following members declared a personal interest in the following items for the reasons noted:-

Councillors Anne Lloyd Jones, Brian Jones, Dewi Lewis and John Wyn Williams in the Housing Stock Ballot Project item because they represented the Council on the Shadow Housing Board;

Councillor Siân Gwenllïan in the question regarding Ysgol Syr Hugh Owen because she was on the school's Governing body, and she was a parent of children who attended the school.

Councillor Owain Williams in the item Reorganising the County's Primary Schools because his daughter was an Educational Psychologist in the county.

Members were of the opinion that they were not prejudicial interests. They did not withdraw from the meeting and participated in full in the discussion on the item.

- (ch) Councillor Pat Larsen declared a personal interest in the item Reorganising the County's Primary Schools, because her sons were head teachers in the primary sector, but she had received a dispensation with a right to speak and vote by the Standards Committee:-
- (d) The Head of Finance declared a personal interest in the question regarding Ysgol Syr Hugh Owen as his wife was employed at the school, however, he remained in the meeting in order to fulfil his duty as the statutory finance officer.

4 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor Pat Larsen and her husband were congratulated on celebrating their Golden Wedding Anniversary recently.

5 QUESTIONS

A question by Councillor Siân Gwenllïan

"Following comments by Councillor Aeron Jones in the last Council meeting (February 26) regarding Ysgol Syr Hugh Owen, Caernarfon, could the Schools Portfolio Leader provide members with an update?"

Response from the Portfolio Leader - Schools, Councillor Liz Saville Roberts

"Thank you for the question.

You have already received a summary of events and the background to the financial position of Ysgol Syr Hugh Owen in the Head of Schools' paper distributed to all members prior to the meeting. The paper was also presented as an urgent item to the Audit Committee on 12 March, 2009.

I would like to take this opportunity to state two things.

Firstly, my disappointment that recent events has brought this Council into disrepute. I am disappointed that some are now of the view that it is better to go to the press than it is to follow the appropriate channels of this democratic body. Why on earth do we have scrutiny committees? Where was the question to the Portfolio Leader, or even to the Head of Service? Where was the attempt to check the facts?

Secondly, can I remind you that there is a side effect to this political bickering on the people in the real world: teachers with mortgages who are unable to sleep at night as they are worried about their jobs: suppliers asking the head teacher of the school about when they would be paid: parents who think twice when selecting a school for their children for September this year.

Every 11 year old child contributes £2,800 to the budget of Ysgol Syr Hugh Owen. Should one child fewer attend the school next September because of these stories, who will be accountable for that?"

Supplementary Question

"Thank you very much for the response.

As a result of the information that the school and Council has acted completely appropriately, and as a result of the unnecessary uncertainty that has been created amongst the children, parents and teachers of Ysgol Syr Hugh Owen, and worse still, amongst prospective pupils, parents and teachers of the school, is it possible for you to investigate further into the issue?"

Response from the Portfolio Leader - Schools

"I will now transfer the matter to the relevant officers".

8 REORGANISING THE COUNTY'S PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- (a) Submitted, for adoption by the Council - a Strategy for Reorganising the County's Primary Schools.
- (b) Councillor Liz Saville Roberts, Portfolio Leader - Schools, reported on the process of drawing up the Strategy.

She explained that a cross-party Improvement Working Group had been established to draw up a strategy for the reorganisation of primary schools arrangements in order to ensure an education of the best quality for the children of the county. The Working Group's first task was to check data regarding schools, along with receiving evidence from a number of bodies and individuals, before progressing to draw up the Strategy.

The Strategy had been approved, with some amendments, by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and the Council Board. In addition, a seminar had been held where there had been an opportunity for councillors and school representatives to receive a summary of the evidence that was the basis of the Strategy, and to ask questions regarding the Strategy.

She emphasised that it was the work and vision of cross-party members, not officers, that was before the Council and she thanked those members for their willingness to lead on a difficult task.

The Schools Leader explained that the vision supported ensuring a maximum of 25 children in classes across the county, and to restrict mixed age classes to 20 children, in order to provide a quality bilingual education and a fair opportunity to children across Gwynedd. The vision also prioritised education and teacher posts, in favour of spending money on maintaining old buildings.

She emphasised that the local opinion was key to the process and that she eagerly looked forward to work with the local community.

- (c) A PowerPoint presentation was received from Iwan Trefor Jones, Corporate Director.

Specific attention was given to the background and context of the work of drawing up the Strategy, to the content of the Strategy; the process of reviewing the individual catchment areas and identifying the next steps.

He referred to the initial work of the working group to gather and analyse data and evidence regarding the county's primary education system.

He elaborated on the initial conclusions of the working group, namely that there was a need for change in some areas for a number of reasons; that there was a need to plan the change area by area, hand in hand with local representatives; that the scale, nature and timetable of the change could vary from area to area and that there was a need to prioritise the areas where the need for change was most obvious, and that there was a need to agree on an order for doing so.

There was agreement that any changes should be considered on the basis of secondary school catchment areas, and a number of key considerations were set out in order to identify the catchment areas where the need for change was most obvious, and the considerations had been transferred into a matrix so as to prioritise the catchment areas which scored highest for a review.

There was commitment to review three catchment areas annually by giving attention to the catchment areas of Tywyn, y Berwyn and y Gader in 2009/10 as the need for change was most obvious here.

He expanded upon the intention to establish Catchment Area Review Panels, which would have broad membership, and would be responsible for gathering local evidence and present ideas and options for drawing up recommendations. Also, he noted the intention to establish a County Consultative Panel with members of the improvement working group transferring to serve on that Panel, and it would be responsible for keeping an eye on the county wide picture and supporting the Portfolio Leader when drawing up proposals.

The Director emphasised that there was great emphasis in the Strategy on providing the best possible experiences to all children in the county by means of the education system. He was confident that the Strategy would enable the Council to plan for individual catchment areas, but it would also plan for providing the best possible experiences for children within the county's education system.

In addition, the Chief Executive explained that the Strategy aimed to reduce the size of large classes and strengthen the smallest classes in the county, in order to ensure that pupils received a full range of experiences and appropriate attention. However, he explained that the modelling work in order to ensure that the targets were achievable, had not been achieved thus far. It was intended to press on with the work in the coming months, and to report back on the situation.

- (ch) Members were given an extensive opportunity to submit observations and to ask questions of officers regarding the Strategy, and officers responded appropriately to them.

The majority of members supported the Strategy, however, the following observations and concerns were noted:-

- that the presentations of the seminar for members and member representatives were one-sided and that this harmed the credibility of the Strategy;
- that there was a need for the Catchment Area Review Panels to give detailed attention to the sustainability of the principles and the social, linguistic and financial impact of the arrangements;
- that there were doubts regarding the validity of the population projections - the Corporate Director explained that there was firm evidence that there had been a substantial decrease in the number of children since 1975, and despite the fact that there was some evidence of a minor increase in the number of children in some areas, it was emphasised that the numbers would not increase to the scale of 1975. Furthermore, the projections of individual schools showed a further decrease over the next three years, and that there was a need to consider these factors when planning for the future of the county's primary education;

- that other countries in Britain presumed in favour of keeping small schools open, and that the Council should place pressure on the Assembly to change its policy;
 - that there was a need for an improved understanding of the budget available from the Assembly for schools - the Director explained that there was a lump sum available from the SBIG fund at the moment. Nevertheless, authorities would need to compete for the money from a central fund in the future, and there would be a need to show that a local strategy for the future of the county's primary education was in place. He emphasised that the Strategy, which planned for individual catchment areas, would strengthen the case;
 - that some of the buildings were in a very poor condition and they would fall into further disrepair by waiting years for the catchment area review - the Director explained that there was a provision in the Strategy for prioritising exceptional and emergency situations.
- (d) Members gave thanks for the thorough process that had taken place in order to bring the Strategy before members, they welcomed the Strategy and were confident that it would enable the Council to move the process forward in an open and transparent manner.

Nevertheless, a member expressed a strong objection to the proposed constitution of the County Consultative Panel, noting that it should reflect the Council's political balance and that it should have constitutional powers, so as to propose formal recommendations to the relevant committees.

Another member expressed support to establishing the Panel, either on the basis of political balance or with one representative from every political group serving on the Panel.

Others referred to the excellent cross-party collaboration of the working group in the past, and to their wish for the representation to continue by means of the County Consultative Panel, in order to take advantage of the collaboration, experience, confidence and expertise of those members.

An amendment to establish a County Consultative Panel which was part of the Council's constitutional procedure, based on political balance, with the powers to propose recommendations to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, the Board and the Council, fell.

In accordance with Procedural Rule 19 (6), the following vote was recorded on the original recommendations:

In favour: (58) Councillors Stephen Churchman, Anwen Davies, E T Dogan, Dyfed Edwards, Dylan Edwards, Elwyn Edwards, Huw Edwards, T G Ellis, Alan Jones Evans, Alun Wyn Evans, Jean Forsyth, Simon Glyn, Keith Greenly-Jones, Margaret Griffith, Selwyn Griffiths, Siân Gwenllïan, Christopher Hughes, Dafydd Ll Hughes, Huw Hughes, Louise Hughes, Sylvia Humphreys, Anne Lloyd Jones, Aeron M Jones, Brian Jones, Charles Wyn Jones, Dai Rees Jones, Eric Merfyn Jones, Evie Morgan Jones, R L Jones, W Penri Jones, P.G.Larsen, Dewi Lewis, Dewi Llewelyn, Dilwyn Lloyd, June Marshall, Keith Marshall, J Wynn Meredith, Linda Morgan, Dewi Owen, W Tudor Owen, Arwel Pierce, Peter Read, Caerwyn Roberts, Glyn Roberts, Ieuan Roberts, John Pughe Roberts, Liz Saville Roberts, Siôn Selwyn Roberts, Gareth Roberts, Dyfrig Siencyn, Ioan Thomas, Guto Rhys Tomos Ann Williams, Gethin Glyn Williams, Gwilym Williams, J.W.Williams, R H Wyn Williams and Robert J Wright.

Against: (0)

Abstentions (3): Councillors Alwyn Gruffydd, Llinos Merks and Owain Williams

In supporting the original recommendations, it was emphasised that this was an opportunity for the Council to press on creatively and innovatively in order to draw up a primary education system for the future. It was explained that the Plan placed emphasis on improving experiences for all children in the county, and that there were clear processes on how to achieve this in the Strategy. It was also hoped that the process would stimulate discussion on community planning.

Furthermore, it was emphasised that some of Gwynedd's schools were in a serious condition, that the Council was spending a substantial amount of money on maintaining buildings, which was an increasing burden on the budgets of primary schools, and that there was a need to put a strategy in place in order to make a strong application to the Assembly for capital funding. In addition, it was explained that it was likely that there would be less budget available for primary schools in the future, which would have very serious implications for the county's primary schools.

RESOLVED to approve the Strategy for Reorganising the County's Primary Schools.

9 THE FIRST REVIEW OF THE THREE YEAR PLAN

Submitted for approval by the Council - the first review of the Three Year Plan.

The Leader set out the background and context of the Plan.

He explained that the Plan summarised the Council's strategic priorities for the coming three years, and noted that considerable work had been achieved in order to hold the review. Every member had been given an opportunity to give input into the process by means of the Council's committees, a workshop session for Council leaders, and every member was invited, by letter, to present observations on the need to review the Plan.

It was noted that further work was needed to confirm the figures for all indicators, and that there was a need to consider reports on the performance of 2008/09, prior to approving the 2009/10 targets.

Many members were of the opinion that the Plan was too ambitious and that there were doubts as to whether all plans could be achieved in the context of the financial challenge that faced the Council. The Chief Executive explained that the workshop and the Resources and Corporate Scrutiny Committee shared the concerns of members, and that the number of projects had been reduced as a result of the concerns. It was noted that there was a need to monitor the Plan continually, and to ensure that there was flexibility to change and amend the Plan in order to respond, as necessary, to changing situations.

Concern was expressed regarding the south Meirionnydd area in relation to sustainable communities, promoting economic development and distributing wealth across the county. The Chief Executive explained that the contact centre had been intentionally established in Penrhyndeudraeth, in order to provide jobs in Meirionnydd, and that work was currently progressing on the business case to consider relocating more public sector jobs to the south of the county.

Further concern was expressed in relation to the future of the area offices. The Chief Executive explained that he was not aware of a threat to the area offices, however, members were reminded of the need to identify substantial savings during the next five years, and that losing jobs across the Council would be unavoidable. However, he emphasised that the geographical allocation of the posts was an important element, and that it was possible for the Council to implement a strategy that protected jobs in the areas where employment opportunities were scarce.

RESOLVED to approve the first review of the Three Year Plan, and to delegate powers to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the relevant portfolio leaders, to agree to the detailed targets for the indicators in the Plan when the results of the full 2008/09 year are known.

10 HOUSING STOCK BALLOT PROJECT – THE BALLOT RESULT

Submitted - the report of the Head of the Housing Stock Ballot Project on the result of the tenant ballot, in order for the Council to receive the result of the ballot and to agree on the way forward.

It was reported to the Council at its previous meeting that "Electoral Reform Ballot Services Ltd" should be commissioned to hold a formal ballot among tenants, with a view on the proposal to transfer the housing stock to Gwynedd Community Homes.

It was explained that the voting period ended on 31 March, and the final results of the ballot were distributed in accordance with the table noted below:-

Number voting YES	3,486 (72% of the valid vote)
Number voting NO	1,356 (28% of the valid vote)
TOTAL	4,842 (100% of the valid vote)

Many members expressed their sadness in relation to the transfer of the housing stock, but they were glad that the result of the ballot was firm, with 72% of the 65% of tenants who voted, being in favour of transferring the housing stock. Members agreed that the tenants' opinion had to be supported, and they were glad that the quality of the houses would improve.

In response to an observation that transferring the stock undermined the Council's work and was a threat to local democracy, it was noted that members' statutory responsibilities in the housing field would continue. Also, the responsibility in relation to assisting and acting on behalf of electors in relation to housing issues would continue.

In relation to the £136million that Gwynedd Community Homes would spend on repairing the houses over the next five years, members emphasised the importance of ensuring that the work would be completed by local builders, so that the local economy took full advantage of the substantial investment.

In response, the Senior Leader - Development explained that work was in progress to look at opportunities for local businesses to develop in order to take advantage of the investment. Also, there was research in the pipeline in order to assess the ability of the construction sector across the Gwynedd and Anglesey area to undertake the work, looking at different procurement models that would maximise the benefit for local

businesses also. The Council would discuss the details of the procurement framework with the new company in order to ensure that it would adopt a procurement strategy that would enable local businesses and workers to take an advantage of the investment.

It was noted that it was important to nurture a good relationship between the Council and Gwynedd Community Homes.

A member expressed uncertainty and doubt regarding not allowing members to express an opinion regarding the transfer of the housing stock. Members were reminded that the Monitoring Officer had advised members many times on the issue - in writing and orally. In accordance with the rules that bound members from expressing an opinion regarding any issue, should they wish to discuss and vote democratically on the matter, it was explained, that members should not prejudice matters, and were advised not to express an opinion for or against during discussions with their electors and tenants. It was noted that the Council itself had been bound to present facts and not express an opinion before tenants.

In response to observations regarding staffing issues and the need to ensure that the senior officers would not have a pay rise, it was explained that many Council officers would transfer to the new body. Nevertheless, there would be a need to appoint to new, higher level posts, and the Corporate Director explained that the independent consultants would advise the Shadow Board about the staffing structure.

The Housing Stock Project Team was thanked for its thorough work and professionalism when tackling the work.

RESOLVED to accept the result of the ballot and confirm the intention to transfer the housing stock to Gwynedd Community Homes.

The meeting commenced at 2.00pm and concluded at 4.10pm.