

Minutes of General Meeting held on 8th June 2023

Present: Cllrs

Allan Morgans – Chair
Amanda Curtis
Simon Grice
Paul Sheldon
Lyn Gibson
Dawn Skelhorn
Margaret Narburgh – Clerk

Apologies:

Jac Armstrong

Visitors

*Darren Millar AM (part of the meeting)

*Attended via video conference

Members of the Public:

Tony King
Hugo Watts

623. Apologies

Cllr Armstrong sent his apologies due to being delayed at work.

624. Meeting Open to the Public

No matters raised.

625. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

626. Welcome Darren Millar MS Member of the Senedd for Clwyd West

The Chair welcomed Mr Millar and thanked him for taking the time to attend the meeting. Mr Millar thanked the Chair and the Clerk for the invitation and apologised for not being able to attend in person.

The Chair asked if there had been any further response from the deputy minister regarding speeding along the A494?

Mr Millar stated that there had been lots of correspondence with Welsh Government over many years regarding improving safety along the A494, particularly reducing speeding through Llanferres, including meetings with the Trunk Road Agency and local County Councillors, and requests for speed cameras to be installed. To date, Welsh Government have been reluctant to introduce speed cameras or further reduce speed limits although flashing speed have been erected at Loggerheads on a shared basis with two other locations along the road into Ruthin. The length of time it takes to agree and implement change is frustrating and the recent reply from Lee Waters was discouraging.

The new Clean Air Act makes provision for Councils to introduce charges for users of Welsh trunk roads. The A55 has been identified as a potential candidate but he feared toll charges could drift onto other roads such as the A494. Members of all parties are concerned that this will push traffic onto unsuitable routes and are lobbying Welsh Government to consider the adverse effects of such action.

The Chair thanked Mr Millar for contacting Audit Wales and for his email earlier today forwarding their response outlining the reasons for the delay in completing the audits. The Clerk had also received an email from Deryck Evans stating the audit conclusion notices for 2022/21 and 2021/22 are in the final stages of completion and should be issued shortly.

Cllr Skelhorn asked if Mr Millar had any suggestions for recruiting more young people onto the Council? Mr Millar stated that Welsh Government had a Youth Parliament which meets once a year to request what they would like to see implemented. Some of those involved in the Youth Parliament do go into politics later. He acknowledged that it was difficult recruiting young people onto Councils as not many are interested and young professionals tend to be too busy developing their careers. He suggested direct leaflet drops and arranging to meet young people locally to raise their interest by providing a better understanding of what is involved. Action: Clerk to put on agenda for next meeting.

Mr Watts asked about plans for electric vehicle charging points in North Wales given the AONB was likely to be classed as a National Park soon which would attract more tourists with more electric vehicles?

Mr Millar stated that at the moment there was only one charging point along the A483 trunk road from north to south Wales and that was outside Greggs in Builth Wells. The matter was debated in the Senedd this week and while the Welsh Government had been allocated more than £50 million to improve the electric charging infrastructure by the UK Government in recent years, only £22 million has been spent on charging points and the remaining funding has been spent on other projects. Ministers favour leaving provision of new charging points to the private sector e.g. pubs, cafes, supermarkets etc. but the Welsh Government needs to incentivise businesses to make this investment. A recent report makes a number of recommendations and Mr Millar offered to forward a copy to the Chair. Action: Clerk to circulate the report to Councillors and members of the public present when it is received.

The Clerk asked why it was necessary for small councils to have both an internal and external audits and could the internal auditor not be given more powers to undertake both?

Mr Millar stated that there have been a few examples of Community Councils managing finances poorly and that this had resulted in changes to the audit regime. He acknowledged that Audit Wales' approach to small councils seemed heavy handed and overburdensome and that this could be distracting auditors from investigating more serious issues.

Mr Millar updated the meeting on matters relating to Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board which has been the subject of much press attention recently. He stated that it was currently in 'Special Measurers' being run by the health minister in Cardiff due to concerns about performance and leadership. Many aspects of performance are poor and waiting times are longer than in other parts of Wales and the UK. In recent months, all the independent board members have been forced to resign yet those responsible for day-to-day management of the NHS in North Wales, who are responsible for the failures, are still in post. He felt the wrong people had been dismissed as a report commissioned by the Independent Board Members had been leaked to the media and himself which identified serious accounting irregularities including false accounting, fraud and misconduct in public office. Mr Millar wanted to assure the Council and residents that he wants those responsible to be held accountable for their actions.

Mr Millar stated he was also aware that Ruthin Dental Practice had issued its 9000 patients with notices that they would not be offering NHS dental care from July onwards but private treatment would be available. He has been in discussions with the practice, health board and others but the practice is still determined to go ahead with its plans. A proposal from the practice to maintain NHS provision for under 18's has been rejected by the Health Board, but the Board is trying to attract a new NHS provider into the area. There is a petition against allowing the practice to close set up on his website if anyone wants to add their name to it.

Mr Millar invited members of the Council to visit the Senedd in Cardiff to watch proceedings. Action: Clerk to establish if anyone wants to attend and arrange a date.

The Chair thanked Mr Millar for his contribution and invited him to stay for the rest of the meeting but understood if he wanted to continue his journey home instead. Mr Millar left the meeting.

627. Approval of Minutes of AGM on 11th May 2023

Cllr Curtis proposed accepting the minutes as a true and accurate record of the meeting and Cllr Grice seconded the motion. Cllrs Morgans, Curtis, Skelhorn and Sheldon voted in favour. There were no abstentions or votes against and the motion was carried.

628. Matters Arising from AGM on 11th May 2023

All actions had been completed by the Clerk on 1st June 2023.

629. Approval of Minutes of General Meeting on 11th May 2023

Cllr Cutis proposed accepting the minutes as a true and accurate record of the meeting subject to an error being corrected in minute 608 changing 'installing to installed'. Cllr Sheldon seconded and Cllrs Morgans, Gibson, Skelhorn and Grice voted in favour. There were no abstentions or votes against and the motion was carried. The Chair amended and signed the minutes accordingly.

630. Matters Arising from the meeting on 11th May 2023

- 388/4 Ongoing, Countryside Services have still not responded to Cllr Morgans which is unusual. Action: Cllr Morgans to chase.
- 533/2 Ongoing, Cllr Grice reported he has submitted a formal application to Denbighshire CC for a new dog foul waste bin and will report back to the Council when he receives a response.
- 598/1 Ongoing. Action Cllr Morgans to chase the stone mason.
- 608 Completed 13.5.23
- 609 Completed 13.5.23
- 615/4 Completed 13.5.23
- 615/5 Completed 13.5.23
- 616 Completed 13.5.23
- 618 Completed 13.5.23
- 621 Completed 13.5.23
- 622 Completed 13.5.23
- 622/4 Ongoing. Action: Cllr Morgans to ask Maeshafn residents' opinion on the installation of CCTV cameras.
- 622/5 Completed 13.5.23

631. Co-option of Councillors

The Clerk had received an expression of interest in becoming a Councillor from Mr Sion Evans. He has been sent relevant paperwork and was invited to attend this meeting but has not responded. Action: Clerk to make contact with him and progress as appropriate.

632. External Audit

The Clerk reported that Welsh Audit office had sent an email stating the 2020/21 or 2021/22 audits were in the final stages of completion and the audit notices would be issued shortly. The paperwork for the 2022/23 audit was sent to the Audit Office on 6th June.

633. Correspondence List

1. St Berres Church and LPFRA thanked the Council for its donation to the raffle for the Kings Coronation celebrations.
2. Councillors were invited to a zoom meeting regarding the introduction of the 20-mph speed limit in Wales.
3. Denbighshire CC invited the Council to respond to its consultation document on the council tax premium for unoccupied homes. The Chair had replied.
4. One Voice Wales sent its training programme for the next two months. Cllr Skelhorn is attending the Code of Conduct course and Cllr Morgans the Creating a Community Place Plan - Module 12 and Introduction to Community Engagement - Module 8.
5. A notice of appeal against an enforcement order on Aberduna Farm, Maeshafn has been received and noted.
6. Denbighshire CC have issued a notice asking dog walkers to keep their pets on leads when visiting the countryside.

634. Local Development Plan and Candidate Sites

Councillors discussed the four candidate sites included in the LDP for the area and agreed to comment as follows:

1. Maeshafn – the land is at the top of a steep, narrow, unadopted lane which is not wide enough for emergency service or construction vehicles to use. There are no utilities nearby and the only access is over another resident's property who has not been approached by the owners.
2. Cadole – access is shown as being from Maeshafn Road and the increase in traffic would create a tailback to get onto the A494.
3. Tafarn y Gelyn – the land is accessed via a narrow lane with a dangerous junction. Allowing the development would add to the congestion already present along the road to Moel Famau.
4. Llanferres – access is opposite an already busy junction along the A494 and would prove difficult unless some form of traffic control was introduced.

Action: Clerk to notify Denbighshire CC.

635. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

The Clerk had drafted and circulated the revised policy. After due discussion, Cllr Curtis proposed adopting it, Cllr Grice seconded and Cllrs Morgans, Gibson, Shelton and Skelhorn voted in favour. There were no abstentions or votes against and the motion was carried. Action: Clerk to publish the revised document.

636. Review of Financial Regulations

The Clerk stated that this document could not be reviewed as it cross referenced Standing Orders and there was an omission in the Standing Orders relative to a proposed amendment. Action: Clerk to include on agenda for July meeting.

637. Revised Standing Orders

The Clerk stated she had read through the revised document issued by One Voice Wales and highlighted the changes made to comply with recent legislation and other points needing to be considered by Councillors. She had notified OVW of a reference to SO 17(f) which did not exist and suspected this was an omission relating to financial controls for public contracts which affects the Financial Regulations.

The Clerk went through the document and Councillors adapted various Standing Orders as appropriate. The Chair proposed the Council waiting until OVW respond and incorporating any additional changes before adopting the revised Standing Orders. Councillors agreed. Action: Clerk to update the document as much as possible and include on agenda for next meeting.

638. Park Improvements

The Clerk reported that six landscape architects had responded to the invitation to quote for professional fees to improve Maes Ysgawen park. Two had declined to quote and the costs for the four who did were £6,995, £7,659, £8,400 and £10,500 excluding VAT. The quotes would be discussed in detail at the next meeting of the sub-committee on 15th June and the outcome reported back to the Council.

The Chair reported that a video meeting had been held with the National Lottery to discuss funding and they confirmed they do provide grants to pay for professional fees as well as capital projects. They went to great length to stress that projects needed to be community driven and the Council would need to 'prove' that the idea's originated from residents in order to be awarded any grants. Action: Clerk to collect evidence of this and circulate to the sub-committee.

The Chair had also spoken to the Sustainable Development officer at Denbighshire CC who also offer grants for professional fees and is waiting for them to notify him when the next round of funding will be available. Action: Cllr Morgans to circulate the information when received.

White Oak Properties have removed the fallen tree from Maes Ysgawen park and the Cllr Morgans has arranged for some of the wood to be collected and used to create a natural wood pile habitat in Maeshafn park.

Phil Lloyd Tree Care have completed their tree report for Maes Ysgawen and quoted for the work to be undertaken in two phases. Phase 1 involves removing the branches overhanging Llanferres playing field which are at risk of falling and damaging the play equipment in the park at a cost of £1,450. The Chair proposed accepting this quotation and having the work done ASAP to eliminate the risk. Cllr Sheldon seconded the motion and Cllrs Curtis, Gibson, Skelhorn and Grice voted in favour. There were no abstentions or votes against and the motion was carried. Action: Clerk to arrange with the contractor and notify LPFRA. Phase 2 involved removing a number of dead trees in autumn 2023 after the leaves have fallen to facilitate greater visibility and heavy pruning in spring 2024 before birds start nesting at a total cost of £2850. Action: Clerk to ask the contractor to provide separate quotes for each element of this second phase.

Phil Lloyd Tree Care have completed pruning of the sycamore tree in Maeshafn park. Action: Clerk to circulate photographs to Councillors.

639. Banking and Accounts

Cllr Sheldon reported he had checked the May bank statements against the internet transactions and accounts and all were correct.

640. Payment of Bills and Invoices

The following bills were presented for authorisation to pay

1. AVOW – payroll invoice for June 2023	£497.81
2. HSBC – bank charges May 2023	£5.40
3. Phil Lloyd – tree report for Maes Ysgawen trees	£150.00
4. Phil Lloyd – pruning of Maeshafn tree	£375.00
5. Post Office – stamps	£6.00
6. One Voice Wales – annual conference fees Chair and Clerk	£120.00
Total bills for payment	£1154.21

Cllr Curtis proposed all bills be paid, Cllr Sheldon seconded and Cllrs Gibson, Morgans, Skelhorn and Grice voted in favour. There were no votes against or abstentions and the motion was carried. Action: Clerk to pay all bills on the schedule.

641. December 2023 Meeting

The Clerk stated she and the Chair were on holiday on 14th December and asked if Councillors wanted to cancel the meeting or bring it forward late November. The precept would need to be agreed before she went away as it needs to be submitted to Denbighshire CC before the first week in January. After due discussion councillors agreed to cancel the December meeting and wait until nearer the time to decide if a meeting in late November was necessary, this would be determined by the volume of business to be decided at the time. Action: Clerk to note.

642. Other Matters brought to the Council's Attention

- The Clerk reported that the school had asked if they could use the village hall on 13th July to hold their leaving concert and had offered the use of a classroom in exchange to hold the next council meeting. After due discussion Councillors agreed to hold the meeting via TEAMS video conference. Action: Clerk to notify the village hall.

2. The Clerk reported that she had received a request from Mr Dyson to invite the enforcement officer to the next council meeting to 'explain' his role and a request from Mr Davies that the Chair meet him on site to discuss the current situation with the donkey trekking business. After due discussion Councillors agreed it would not be appropriate for the Council to have any further involvement as it was now a matter to be resolved between the enforcement officer, the owner and the residents.
Action: Clerk to notify both parties of the decision.

Cllr Morgans proposed closing the meeting, Cllr Curtis seconded and Cllrs Sheldon, Gibson, Skelhorn and Grice voted in favour. The meeting was closed at 21.30 pm.

The next General Meeting of the Council will be held on Thursday 13th July 2023 at 7.30 pm by TEAMS video conference facility.