

At a **MEETING of COUNCIL** held on Wednesday 20th November 2013 in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices, Wellington Road, Rhyl commencing at 6.00pm.

PRESENT

Councillor A. J. Rutherford (Mayor)

Councillors I. W. Armstrong, Mrs J. Chamberlain-Jones, Mrs E. M. Chard, A. R. James, Mrs M. McCarroll, Mrs P. M. Jones, J. May, B. F. Moylan, Mrs W. M. Mullen-James, S. H. Ratcliffe, Miss S. L. Roberts, Miss R. Siddall and Miss C. L. Williams.

Mr G. J. Nickels – Town Clerk
Miss H. J. Windus - Personal Assistant & Secretary

75. OPENING OF MEETING

The Mayor's Chaplain, Rev. Stan Walker commenced proceedings by leading all present in prayer.

76. APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were received on behalf of Councillors B. Blakeley (indisposed), Mrs J. Butterfield MBE (family commitment), Ms J. Hughes (indisposed), P. Prendergast (work commitment), D. Simmons (mayoral engagement) and W. N. Tasker (family commitment).

77. PRESENTATION FROM GIDEONS INTERNATIONAL TO THE MAYOR

The Mayor welcomed Mr John Graham to the meeting and invited him to address Members.

Mr Graham duly responded and was pleased to present the Mayor with copies of the Scriptures.

78. MINUTES

The Minutes of the following Meetings of Council and Committees were submitted for approval as a correct record:

Council - 16th October 2013 - Min.Nos. 63-74

Proposed by Councillor A. J. Rutherford and seconded by Councillor Mrs E. M. Chard and **RESOLVED** as a correct record.

Planning Committee - 16th October 2013 - Min.Nos. 23-26

Proposed by Councillor Mrs E. M. Chard and seconded by Councillor A. R. James and **RESOLVED** as a correct record.

Planning - 6th November 2013 - Min.Nos. 27-30
Committee

Proposed by Councillor Mrs E. M. Chard and seconded by Councillor A. R. James and **RESOLVED** as a correct record.

To Confirm or otherwise:

Strategic & Operational - 28th October 2013 - Min.Nos.1-9
Planning Committee

Proposed by Councillor A. J. Rutherford and seconded by Councillor Mrs W. M. Mullen-James and **RESOLVED** as a correct record and confirmed for action.

Finance & General - 6th November 2013 - Min.Nos. 83-99
Purposes Committee

Proposed by Councillor Miss S. L. Roberts and seconded by Councillor A. R. James and **RESOLVED** as a correct record and confirmed for action.

With regard to Item No.87 (Denbighshire Big Plan II – What are your priorities?) the Town Clerk reported that the Rhyl consultation event had been cancelled.

The Town Clerk also referred to Item No.97 (Illuminations) and informed Members that unfortunately the net lighting the Council had instructed him to purchase to enhance the Christmas Tree lights on the High Street up to the value of £500 had not been possible due to advice taken from Blachere Illuminations and because the cost of the nets far exceeded the allocation budget. However, the Town Clerk advised that he had purchased more of the same lights used on the tree, which would give a greater impact and within £500.

79. MAYOR'S REPORT

The Mayor referred to the list of engagements he and the Deputy Mayor had attended over the last month and in particular to the performance of "A Musical Kaleidoscope" at the Little Theatre and the town's Remembrance Sunday services.

The Mayor added that he had also successfully completed a 24 hour Exerciseathon at Rhyl Leisure Centre in aid of Children in Need and thanked everybody for their sponsorship. Members congratulated the Mayor and his Consort, who also took part and completed the full 24 hours.

80. PRESENTATIONS REGARDING THE POTENTIAL RELOCATION OF RHYL'S MAIN POST OFFICE

Further to Minute No.50 of the meeting on 18th September 2013, the Mayor welcomed Ms Non Williams, Senior Stakeholder Manager for the Post Office, and Ms Jenny Windsor, Counters Area Representative from the Communication Workers Union to the meeting and invited them to address Council.

Ms Williams advised that:

- There were over 1,000 Post Offices in Wales – 97% franchised and the remaining 3% were Crown branches staffed by Post Office employees.

- The 3% were making a loss of £37 million each year.
- The aim was to 'break even' by April 2015.
- The Post Office was looking to grow its services, including a current account.
- A franchise was proposed for Rhyl's Crown Post Office.
- For every £1 spent in Rhyl Post Office there was a loss of £1.61 which was not sustainable.
- The Post Office wanted to keep its services in Rhyl and was looking for a reputable local business partner as was delivered in Bangor within the WH Smiths store.
- In February of this year the staff at the Rhyl Post Office were spoken to and were offered TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment)) with the new partner employer.
- There would not be any compulsory redundancies.
- In April expressions of interest were invited and although a number of businesses came forward, they did so after the closing date, so a second invitation is now underway with a closing date of 3rd December.
- Once a partner had been identified there would be a six week public consultation.

Ms Windsor advised that:

- In February of this year the Post Office announced plans to close and franchise 75 Crown offices, representing 20% of the network and cut up to 1,500 jobs and areas were identified as being hit directly. Eight of the 20 Crown offices in North Wales are being put out to franchise to another partner – Camarthen, Holyhead, Holywell, Llangefni, Morrison, Neath, Part Talbot and Rhyl.
- We are dismayed with the cost saving plans by 2015 instead of investing in the Crown network and consider these plans to be a closure exercise, as the Post Office believes these areas are not affluent enough to generate enough income via their financial products.
- The Post Office say that these eight Crown offices are not cost efficient but to date we have not received information on the criteria used to identify these offices, despite numerous requests, and what they fail to mention when they quote the £1 spent £1.61 cost ratio is that this includes the Head Office cost.
- We believe that many alternative options could have been explored which would have saved them millions, for example, 'Post Bank' for vulnerable and low income customers, relocating to cheaper buildings or merging two Crown offices within a few miles of each other in larger towns and cities, consulting with local Councils to negotiate lower rents for relocations, renting out empty rooms and floors of Post Office buildings, reducing the top heavy management structure and imposing a pay freeze on senior manager's significant bonuses and highly inflated pay rises.

- There was evidence of a detrimental impact on high streets where Post Office services had been relocated to business parks or to the rear of a supermarket or store, which would further affect Rhyl town centre, and also of a drop in the quality of service received by customers in franchised WH Smiths stores along with problems experienced in accessing these stores. The quality of customer experience in Crown Post Offices continues to increase.
- The eight members of staff at Rhyl Post Office have over 200 years experience between them.
- Staff in franchised offices will be on minimum wage.
- There was a huge rejection from the public at packed public meetings.
- The Union have worked with the Post Office to reduce debt but ultimately the failure to make significant inroads was down to lazy and unimaginative management.

In response to Members' questions Ms Williams stated that:

- The Post Office owned the building and leased part of it to other companies.
- The agreement was taking time because they wanted to choose the right partner giving due diligence.
- If the business wanted to withdraw further down the line it would have to give the Post Office a year's notice and interim measures would be taken if that business failed.
- Accessibility to the chosen retail partner's premises was a priority for us.
- The £1.61 figure included the cost of the regional management structure of the Crown office which equates to two senior managers.
- Smaller retail units current standing empty in the town centre had been considered but were not cost effective.
- There was too many counters at the current Crown office in Rhyl and that a revised number would be introduced.
- The town's deprivation figures will have been taken into account.
- Post Office services now trade in a very competitive market so had to be streamlined to survive.
- If real material evidence was produced in support of keeping the Crown office in its current location then it would be considered as part of the six week 'meaningful' public consultation.

The Mayor thanked Ms Williams and Ms Windsor for their attendance.

RESOLVED that the Town Clerk to invite Ms Williams back to the Town Council to update them on how the franchise invitation was progressing.

81. PRESENTATIONS FROM RHYL GOING FORWARD OFFICERS (IF REQUIRED)

Further to Minute No.29 of the meeting held on 3rd July 2013, the Town Clerk reported that there had been no request to report to the Town Council.

82. MEMBERS INFORMATION ITEMS

There were no urgent matters arising.

83. QUESTION TIME

No members of the public were present.

84. CLOSURE OF MEETING

There being no further items of business the Mayor declared the Meeting of Council closed.

Mayor:

Date: