

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

THE EARL BALDWIN SUITE, DUKE HOUSE, CLENSMORE STREET,

KIDDERMINSTER

21ST AUGUST 2008 (6:00 PM)

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**Present:**

Councillors: J-P Campion (Chairman), M J Hart (Vice-Chairman), S J M Clee, N J Desmond, Mrs A T Hingley and Mrs T L Onslow.

**Observers:**

Councillors: Mrs H E Dyke, P Dyke, M B Kelly, J Phillips and J Thomas.

**CAB.46 Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

**CAB.47 Declarations Of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

**CAB.48 Minutes**

**DECISION: The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 24th July 2008 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

**CAB.49 Call Ins**

No decisions had been called in since the last Cabinet meeting.

**CAB.50 Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

**CAB.51 Leader's Announcements**

The Leader commented on the Annual Leisure Tour which had taken place. Cabinet were advised that it had been an opportunity for Members to see the range of leisure activities provided by the Council. The Head of Community and Partnership Services was commended and congratulations were offered to her team for the range of available activities which offered value for money. It was explained that details of the activities offered were contained on the Council's website.

**CAB.52 Budget Monitoring – First Quarter 2008/2009**

A report was considered from the Head of Financial Services regarding the monitoring of the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme in accordance with the Local Government Act 2003 and Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).

The Leader drew attention to Appendix 2 of the report which outlined areas where there were issues or concerns. However as a caveat it was noted that this was only the first quarter of the year and three quarters of the budgetary cycle still remained.

Attention was drawn to the Council's budget for fuel and energy. It was noted that costs had risen dramatically and whilst the former Treasurer had been prudent in calculating the estimated rises these had been higher than anticipated.

Cabinet noted that income from the Land Charges Section had dropped as a result of individuals undertaking surveys on behalf of solicitors.

Moreover, it was noted that an Action Plan had been formulated by the Corporate Management Team to address issues that had been identified and the Cabinet were informed that another report would be brought to the September 2008 Cabinet meeting.

**DECISION:**

- 1. The projected budget variations and comments outlined within the report to Cabinet be noted. An Action Plan to address any overspends or projected loss of income be considered at the September 2008. Cabinet in conjunction with revised budget proposals prior to approval by Council.**
- 2. The Income Generation Projection Report be noted.**
- 3. The Heads of Service continue to monitor closely the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme.**
- 4. The updated Capital programme and Vehicle, Equipment and Systems Renewal Schedule 2008/2009, brought about by slippage and reassessment, be noted.**
- 5. The revised Budget Risk Matrix be noted.**
- 6. It be noted that no supplementary estimates/virements have been reported at this stage.**

**CAB.53 Sundry/Property Debt Position as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008**

A report was considered from the Head of Financial Services that informed Members of the Sundry/Property debt position as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008 together with details of performance against targets.

Cabinet were informed that this was a new report which had been presented as part of the monitoring of the Council's debts and that such monitoring formed an integral part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). Furthermore the excellent track record the Council had at collecting its debts was noted.

**DECISION:**

- 1. The Sundry/Property debt level, age of debt and performance against targets as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008 be noted.**
- 2. It be agreed that a review of payment methods for debtor amounts be carried out and reported to Cabinet as part of the next six month review.**

**CAB.54 The Place Survey**

A report was considered from the Head of Community and Partnership Services that advised Members of the process that would be undertaken in order to satisfy the requirements of the statutory 2008 'Place Survey.'

The Cabinet was informed that it was now a requirement for Councils to move towards a new 'place-based' approach to delivering services and monitoring performance. It was noted that the Place Survey would replace the BVPI user specific survey and it would be a statutory requirement to undertake the survey every 2 years. The purpose of the Place Survey would be to ascertain the views, experiences and perceptions of local people. This information would then be used to set future priorities for the Council.

A timetable contained in the report outlined the dates for preparation and delivery of the survey. The Council was joining with the other Councils in Worcestershire in order to secure economies of scale in procuring the services of an external market research company to deliver the Place Survey. Worcestershire County Council had invited a range of external research companies to tender for delivering the Place Survey 2008 for all Worcestershire Councils. The quotations were assessed against a set of criteria and IPSOS Mori were considered to be best placed to deliver the Place Survey 2008.

**DECISION:**

- 1. The process to be undertaken to satisfy the requirements of the statutory 2008 Place Survey be noted.**
- 2. IPSOS MORI be commissioned by Worcestershire County Council to undertake Wyre Forest District Council's 2008 Place Survey.**
- 3. The results of the 2008 Place Survey be reported to Cabinet in April 2009.**

**CAB.55 Review of Travel Token Conditions**

A report was considered from the Head of Financial Services that asked the Cabinet to consider varying the current conditions in relation to eligibility for travel tokens.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Rural Affairs commented that a review of the criteria had taken place following the receipt of complaints and comments that related to the use of a car by the over 80's. Cabinet were informed that whilst most of the over 80's lived with family members or friends they were not able to access the car during the day and it was therefore perceived that condition 3 of the scheme was somewhat prescriptive.

Cabinet were informed that the usage of travel tokens over the last 4 years had reduced and there had been an increase of 20% in applications for bus passes since the national free fare concession had come into force on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008. It was anticipated that the removal of condition 3 would cause an increase in applicants for travel tokens but it was perceived that the increase could be managed within existing budgets. It was noted that there were 770 over 80 year olds in Wyre Forest who were not currently claiming travel tokens.

**RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: The rules of the current Transport Token scheme be amended to remove the car use condition.**

**CAB.56 Wyre Forest Affordable Warmth Strategy and Action Plan**

A report was considered from the Head of Planning, Health and Environment that updated Members of the Cabinet on progress made in delivering the Wyre Forest Affordable Warmth Strategy in 2007/08 and asked for endorsement of the actions planned for 2008/2009.

The Cabinet member for Housing, Health and Rural Affairs commented that as fuel costs were rising, affordable warmth would become an important issue. Accordingly the Sustainability Team were raising awareness of affordable warmth through the 2008/2009 strategy and action plan.

**DECISION: The 2008/09 Affordable Warmth Action Plan be endorsed and that the 2007/08 Affordable Warmth Action Plan Report be noted.**

**CAB.57 Safeguarding Children Policy**

A report was considered from the Head of Community and Partnership Services that reported on the update of the Council's Safeguarding Children Policy.

The Cabinet Member for Leisure Services commented that the policy produced in 2005 had been updated to include a framework for employees, particularly those with access to children.

- 1. The Safeguarding Children Policy 2008/2011 be implemented with immediate effect and be subject to final approval by Council at a future date.**
- 2. A formal review of the Policy be carried out in 2011.**

**CAB.58 Wyre Forest District Empty Shops Strategy**

A report was considered from the Head of Planning, Health and Environment that asked the Cabinet to agree an Empty Shops Strategy to encourage businesses to take up vacant retail units within the District's town centres.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise advised the Cabinet that £20,000 had been included in the budget to support some of the empty shops in the Wyre Forest District. Criteria had been drawn up to allow £4,000 to be paid to new businesses to who relocated into one of the empty shops in the district.

One Member commented that although the Strategy was welcomed there was concern that the strategy was capital based rather than revenue based. Another issue identified was the shop proprietor would be given the money on production of evidence that the money had been spent. There was also concern that large retailers would be eligible for the money and that the criteria should be aimed at small businesses to do something that they would not have achieved without such a grant.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise clarified that the grant was aimed at smaller units and was intended more for start up businesses and businesses that were relocating to the district. It was noted that there had been a great deal of interest in the grant since it had been introduced and it was hoped that perhaps further development of the scheme might be possible next year.

**DECISION:**

- 1. The Empty Shops Strategy set out in Appendix A to the report to Cabinet be approved.**
- 2. Delegated authority be given to the Head of Planning, Health and Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet member for Regeneration and Enterprise, to monitor grant take up and review and, if necessary, amend the strategy to ensure satisfactory implementation.**

**CAB.59 Recommendations from Community Services Scrutiny Committee Driving Standards Agency Review Panel**

Councillor J Phillips introduced the recommendations from the Driving Standards Agency Review Panel.

Cabinet were informed that the Review Panel had been set up because of plans to close the Castle Road Test Centre in Kidderminster. Also there had appeared to be inconsistencies in the Driving Standards Agency's approach to the location of driving test centres and the implementation of its travel criteria. The Panel had also considered that the Driving Standards Agency had not seriously considered alternative accommodation in Kidderminster.

The Leader of the Council congratulated Councillor Phillips on his presentation to Cabinet and was grateful for him for taking up a worthwhile cause and endeavouring to progress this matter.

The recommendations were accepted subject to minor amendments as detailed below:

**DECISION: The recommendations as detailed below be agreed:**

1. The Chief Executive be authorised to write to the Driving Standards Agency in the strongest terms requesting them to reconsider the proposal to close the Kidderminster Test Centre and relocate to Lower Gornal, Dudley.
2. Subject to the Driving Standards Agency's willingness to reinstate a facility in the District, the Council assist the Driving Standards Agency in identifying potential sites for consideration.
3. Dr Richard Taylor, the Local Member of Parliament be requested to put forward Parliamentary questions or use other acceptable means to urge the Secretary of Transport as follows:
  - i) Why are there inconsistencies in the Driving Standard's Agencies implementation of its distance criteria? According to calculations, Cannock falls into the same population density category as the District of Wyre Forest but Cannock has had a new test centre facility recently, despite its proximity to Wolverhampton where there is also a test centre. Conversely Kidderminster, which is not close to a test centre, has been proposed for closure.
  - (ii) Ministers approved the DSA's distance setting criteria in 1998. Whilst this criterion would serve the larger/Metropolitan urban areas well, for those localities including larger shire towns and cities that have a large rural hinterland, it can prove to be a disadvantage. Are there any plans to amend the current criteria to ensure that those localities that do have a large rural hinterland are not disadvantaged by the criteria?

**CAB.60 Recommendations from the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee 7<sup>th</sup> August 2008 re : Local Land and Property Gazetteer**

The Cabinet considered recommendations from the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee regarding the Local Land and Property Gazetteer. It was recognised that having a single database would be of benefit to the Council.

**DECISION:** The recommendation as set out below be agreed:

**The Local Land and Property Gazetteer be adopted as the single address database within Wyre Forest District council and other databases be phased out.**

The meeting closed at 6.55 pm.