

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL  
CABINET  
THE EARL BALDWIN SUITE, DUKE HOUSE, CLENSMORE STREET,  
KIDDERMINSTER  
25TH SEPTEMBER 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, Mrs J Fairbrother-Millis, D J Millis, Mrs F M Oborski and G C Yarranton.

**CAB 61 Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

**CAB. 62 Declaration of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

**CAB. 63 Minutes**

**Decision : The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 21st August 2008 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

**CAB. 64 Call ins**

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

**CAB.65 Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

Members of the Cabinet were informed that a late report would be considered at agenda item number 12 concerning a Free Swimming Initiative.

**CAB.66 Public Participation**

No members of the public had asked to participate at this meeting of the Cabinet.

**CAB. 67 Leader's Announcements**

1. Community Fair

Members were informed that a Community Fair would be held on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2008 at the Town Hall in Kidderminster. The Fair would be an opportunity to demonstrate the range of multi cultural services that were available within the district.

2. Grants for Flooded Properties

The Cabinet were informed that a grant of £250 would be available to home owners who had been flooded for a third time. In excess of 25 properties had been affected. Members were informed that the Head of Property and Operational Services would administer the grant fund. The decision to make the grant available had been made as an urgent decision and had been endorsed by the Chairman of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee.

3. Award of Heritage Lottery Grant to Carpet Museum Trust

It was noted that the Carpet Museum Trust had been successful in attracting a Heritage Lottery Grant of £1.7 million. It was anticipated that at the next meeting of the Kidderminster Education Foundation Working Group a discussion would take place on how the Council would support this important attraction.

**CAB. 68 Wyre Forest Matters Progress and Achievements**

A report was considered from the Head of Community Services that informed the Cabinet of the work of Wyre Forest Matters over the past year.

The report highlighted the achievements of the Local Strategic Partnership and the progress that had been made in key areas, in particular the progress made on achieving targets was noted. Moreover it was likely that the partnership would reap significant reward monies in the future.

Members of the Cabinet were informed that a Worcestershire Partnership Management Group had been set up to consider the criteria for the award of reward monies next year and the Local Strategic Partnership would be able to bid for this money.

The Chairman of the Economic and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee pointed out a small inaccuracy in the report to Cabinet in that Councillor David Millis had chaired the LSP Review Committee and not herself as stated in the report.

**DECISION:**

1. **The new structure of Wyre Forest Matters be endorsed.**

2. **The Chief Executive be authorised in consultation with The Leader to support the work of Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and the Local Strategic Partnership priorities as outlined in the “Making a Real Difference” Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and the Worcestershire Local Area Agreement (LAA).**
3. **The progress of the LSP and its current work to develop an action plan to prioritise the delivery of the SCS and the LAA be endorsed and it be requested that the Chief Executive monitors progress and reports such progress, on a regular basis, to Members.**
4. **The Leader of the Council and Chief Executive ensure that Wyre Forest benefits from a fair and equitable distribution of any potential LAA reward monies in 2009 within any criteria adopted by the Worcestershire Partnership.**

**CAB 69 Budget Monitoring Action Plan**

A report was considered from the Head of Financial Services that updated the Cabinet on the plans in relation to budget monitoring following the Quarter 1 Budget Monitoring report which was presented to Cabinet on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2008.

Cabinet had been alerted to the fact that there was a projected variance in the budget amounting to £300,000. The Chief Executive had therefore been asked to identify ways in which the budget could be brought back into line.

It was noted that there had been a significant increase in fuel and energy charges and that this had had an impact on the budget.

Cabinet asked for an assurance that economies of scale were being achieved due to the Council being part of a consortium for purchasing fuel and energy. The Head of Property and Operational Services agreed to check that the Council's supplier provided a competitive price.

**DECISION:**

1. **The progress in identifying necessary reductions in revenue expenditure to meet the position reported at Quarter 1 Budget Monitoring be noted.**
2. **The Chief Executive be requested to identify as a matter of urgency further measures required in order to bring the overall budget back into line.**

**CAB 70 Worcestershire Hub – Strategic Direction**

A report was considered from the Head of Human Resources that updated the Cabinet on the proposed development of the vision and business case for the future strategic direction of the Worcestershire Hub.

The Cabinet Member for Community and Corporate Services informed the Cabinet that the County Council was looking to realign some money from the hub fund to fund a centralised telephone centre for the hub. The rationale for this proposal being that there was inconsistency in the service that was provided by the districts with regard to quality and output. The County Council had also perceived that the volume of County services delivered would be broadly equal to the volume of District services and that the costs of operating the Hub would be met in equal shares between County and District. However this had not been achieved and a number of major services were outstanding. The Hub Strategic Management Group had therefore developed a future vision for the Hub with a three stage programme of change as detailed below:

Stage 1 – Move to a single telephony centre (call centre)

Stage 2 - Business process review

Stage 3 - Move to a Single Management Structure

The options available to the Council were as follows:

Option 1 – Status Quo

Option 2 – Move incrementally to a single telephony centre managed by WCC

Option 3 – Withdraw completely from the Hub partnership and focus attention on a comprehensive service centre for District functions only without WCC funding.

A Member expressed concern that should the telephony service be transferred out of the district as with a centralised service the telephonists would not be familiar with our Council staff.

The Leader commended the hub staff for their performance and delivery of services. He concluded that it was important to explore all possibilities and that there would be no job cuts and that the Council was not looking presently to transfer any staff to Worcestershire. The Cabinet were in agreement in principle with option 2 as outlined above.

**DECISION:**

- 1. The cabinet notes the County Council's intention to reduce the funding for the Wyre Forest Hub by £47,000 from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009.**
- 2. The County Council be asked to recognise the strong performance of the Wyre Forest Hub in relation to County Services and to limit any reduction in funding to £30,000 particularly as we provide Hub services in Kidderminster, Stourport and Bewdley.**

**That Option 2 (incremental move to a single telephony centre) be adopted in principle as a way forward with progression dependent on a reasonable "fit" with the Council's Shared Services Strategy 2008-2001 and full consultation with Trade Union and employee representatives.**

**CAB 71 Smoke –Free – The First 12 Months**

A report was considered from the Head of Planning, Health and Environment that outlined the review of the first twelve months of smoke free legislation.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Rural Affairs informed the Cabinet that the report set out the activities and outcomes of the past year and that Wyre Forest had a high level of compliance with regard to the smoke free legislation. During the next phase, it was intended that inspections and visits would continue to monitor implementation of the legislation but there would also be partnership working with the Primary Care Trust and this would link with the work of the Local Strategic Partnership.

A Member raised concern that not all bus drivers in Kidderminster were not recognising that a company vehicle was a place of work and therefore should be reminded not smoke within the buses they were driving.

In response to concerns that the smoking ban had affected pub trade, the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Rural Affairs told the Cabinet that the real problem for pubs regarding decreasing numbers of people using pubs was the fact that supermarkets were offering cheap alcohol for consumption at home.

**DECISION: Agreement be given to the enforcement proposals as set out in paragraphs 4.16 – 4.18 of the report to Cabinet.**

**CAB 72 Wyre Forest Empty Property Strategy Refresh**

A report was considered from the Head of Planning, Health and Environment that outlined the refreshed Wyre Forest Empty Property Strategy for 2008-2011.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Rural Affairs commented that the new Strategy built on the work achieved over 3 years ago where 89 properties had been brought back into use or had been demolished. Cabinet Members noted that there were approximately 2,000 empty properties in the district, 680 of which had been empty for a considerable time. Thus these properties were those that the strategy was designed to target. Members' attention was also drawn to the fact that Ward Councillors could report empty homes to the Decent Homes Officer.

The Cabinet Member for Leisure Services commented that the staff who had worked on the strategy should be congratulated. Empty properties were a wasted resource and caused problems for local residents.

**RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: The Wyre Forest Property Strategy 2008-2011 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report to Cabinet be adopted.**

**CAB 73 Housing and Planning Delivery Grant 2008/09**

A report was considered from the Head of Planning, Health and Environment that advised the Cabinet on the new Housing and Planning Delivery Grant award for 2008/09 and requested agreement on how it would be spent.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise stated that the grant replaced the Planning Delivery Grant and aimed at incentivising improvements to the planning service. A range of areas where the grant would be used were outlined in the report.

**DECISION:**

- 1. The 2008/09 Housing and Planning Delivery Grant award be noted and its use be agreed within the Planning Health and Environment Division as set out in paragraph 3.8 of this report.**
- 2. The Head of Planning, Health and Environment, in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Environment & Regeneration, be given delegated authority to vary monies between the areas of expenditure, and between years if necessary.**

**CAB 74 Recommendations from Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee**

The Cabinet considered recommendations from the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee from the meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2008

**Customer Services Review**

**DECISION:** the recommendations as set out below be noted:

- 1 The Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee wish to congratulate the Hub staff on the success of their achievements to date in delivering a first class service.**
- 2 Strongly oppose any attempt by Worcestershire County Council to withdraw funding for services by the Kidderminster Hub.**

**Budget Consultation**

**DECISION:** the recommendations as set out below be agreed:

**The draft public consultation budget questionnaire be approved.**

**CAB. 75 Free Swimming Initiative, Wyre Forest District Council**

A report was considered from the Head of Community and Partnership Services that informed the Cabinet of the opportunities presented by the Government's free swimming initiative.

The Cabinet Member for Leisure Services advised Members that funds were to be made available to Councils over the course of the next 2 years in order to provide a free swimming initiative for under 16's and over 60's. Members noted that there were 26,000 over 60's and 16,000 under 16's in the district. It was further noted that DC Leisure, the company that ran the Council's leisure centres would underwrite any shortfall in the grant that may arise in order for these schemes to operate.

The Leader supported the initiative but pointed out that it would cease after two years if the Government did not continue to support it as the Council was unable to commit local resources beyond the time limit of the project.

It was noted that the majority of district councils were not adopting the initiative with regard to under 16's. The Council had provided free swimming for under 16's during the summer holidays and this new initiative would enable under 16's to swim free all year round.

**RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:**

- 1. The Head of Community and Partnership Services in consultation with the Head of Financial Services, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Cabinet Member for Leisure Services be requested to progress the Government Free Swimming Initiative.**
- 2. The Head of Community and Partnership Services, in consultation with the Head of Financial Services, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be given delegated authority to agree with the Council's partners DC Leisure, the details of the scheme.**
- 3. The schemes to progress on the principle that free swimming is only available to Wyre Forest residents unless the detailed conditions of grant prohibits this restriction.**

The meeting closed at 6.48 pm.

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