

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

SPECIAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER

WEDNESDAY, 23RD JULY 2014 (6.00PM)

Present:

Councillors: E Davies (Chairman), J Phillips (Vice-Chairman), J Greener, P B Harrison, J A Hart, V Higgs, L Hyde, B McFarland, M Price, M Rayner, C Rogers and M J Wrench.

Observers

Councillors: C Brewer, N J Desmond, H E Dyke, M J Hart, J Holden, M B Kelly, J A Shaw and P W Wooldridge.

OS.20 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: P V Hayward, T L Onslow and A M Sewell.

OS.21 Appointment of Substitutes

Councillor P B Harrison was appointed as a substitute for Councillor P V Hayward. Councillor J A Hart was appointed as a substitute for Councillor T L Onslow. Councillor B McFarland was appointed as a substitute for Councillor A M Sewell.

OS.22 Declarations of Interests by Members

No declarations of interest were made.

OS.23 Joint Worcestershire Regulatory Services Task Group – Final Report

The Committee considered the final report from the Joint Worcestershire Regulatory Services Task Group. Members received a comprehensive presentation from the Chair and Vice Chair of the group at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3rd July 2014, where the item was deferred for further consideration by Members.

The Director of Economic Prosperity and Place led Members through a general briefing note on Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS), which had been circulated prior to the meeting. Members were advised WRS was a shared service of Worcestershire County Council and the six District Councils which was formed on 1st June 2010, and is hosted by Bromsgrove District Council.

Councillor H E Dyke clarified the issues raised regarding the Council's attendance record of the task group meetings. A request had been made by Councillor Dyke to amend the draft terms of reference to include a nominated member, as it was

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proposed the membership of the group should consist of the Chair or Vice Chair of each authorities Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Dyke had raised concerns at the outset that she may find it difficult to attend due to work and commitments, however the request was declined.

The Committee discussed each of the task group's recommendations in turn, and agreed the following:

- **Recommendation 1 – agreed.**
- **Recommendation 2 – agreed.**
- **Recommendation 3 – agreed.**
- **Recommendation 4 – agreed.**
- **Recommendation 5 – agreed, with a proposal to review the effectiveness of the post in 12 months time.**
- **Recommendation 6 a – agreed.**
- **Recommendation 6b – rejected until further information is provided.**
- **Recommendation 7 – rejected as no clear reason to change current arrangements.**
- **Recommendation 8 – rejected.**
- **Recommendation 9 – rejected.**
- **Recommendation 10a, b & c – agreed, subject to substituting 'WRS Board' for 'Joint Committee'.**
- **Recommendation 11 – agreed.**
- **Recommendation 12a – agreed.**
- **Recommendation 12b – rejected, the group proved to be ineffective in the past due to the difficulty in arranging meetings.**

The meeting was suspended at 6.58pm, and re-convened at 7.02pm.

OS.24 Call In – Review of Worcestershire Hub Satellite Offices at Stourport-on-Severn and Bewdley

The Committee considered two call in requests from the Independent Community and Health Concern (ICHC) and UK Independence Party (UKIP) groups regarding a decision made by the Cabinet Member for Resources and Transformation, under the Strong Leader Model, to endorse the proposal to shut the Worcestershire Hub Satellite Offices at Stourport-on-Severn and Bewdley.

The cost of running the two sites was approximately £50,000 a year, and the decision to close them contributed towards the savings of £213,000 that the revenues, benefits and hub service were required to achieve as agreed in the medium term financial strategy and budget for 2014-15 onwards.

The Committee raised concerns over the process by which the decision was made and the lack of consultation with members of the public and town councils.

Some members of the Committee felt that the closure of the satellite hubs would have a detrimental effect on the quality of service the Council provided as not all residents had access to use the telephone and on-line services, and relied on the face-to-face customer service contact. Some members questioned if the decision was in the best interest of the electorate as it might further alienate members of the public from the Council.

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A suggestion was made to introduce a 'use it or lose it' policy for the hub in Stourport-on-Severn with a view to reviewing the usage after a period of time. The Committee asked if the usage of hubs had been affected by recent changes in policy; if this was the case and the hub system was seen to be outdated, a debate on the hub model should be held by Council.

An amendment was moved for the decision made by the Cabinet Member for Resources and Transformation to be upheld. Following a named vote and the Chairman's casting vote, the amendment was lost.

The named vote on the amendment was recorded as follows:

For:

Councillors J Greener, P B Harrison, J A Hart, J Phillips, M Price and C Rogers.

Against:

Councillors E Davies, V Higgs, L Hyde, B McFarland, M Rayner and M J Wrench.

Chairman's casting vote: Against.

Following a formal request from the Committee, the Cabinet Member was not minded to reconsider the decision.

The Committee took a named vote to refer the matter to Council. Following a named vote and the Chairman's casting vote, the proposal was carried.

The named vote on the proposal was recorded as follows:

For:

Councillors E Davies, V Higgs, L Hyde, B McFarland, M Rayner and M J Wrench.

Against:

Councillors J Greener, P B Harrison, J A Hart, J Phillips, M Price and C Rogers.

Chairman's casting vote: For.

Resolution of Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

To arrange for full Council to discharge the Committee's function to review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge of functions which are the responsibility of the executive, namely the decision made by the Cabinet Member to endorse the proposal to shut the Worcestershire Hub Satellite Offices at Stourport-on-Severn and Bewdley.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 8.11pm.