

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER

30TH JULY 2014 (6PM)

Present:

Councillors: S J Williams (Chairman), C Rogers (Vice-Chairman), J Aston, G W Ballinger, R Bishop, C Brewer, J-P Champion, S J M Clee, A R Clent, E Davies, N J Desmond, H E Dyke, P Dyke, B T Glass, D R Godwin, J Greener, P B Harrison, J A Hart, M J Hart, P V Hayward, V Higgs, A T Hingley, J Holden, L Hyde, M B Kelly, N Knowles, R J Lloyd, B McFarland, C D Nicholls, F M Oborski, T L Onslow, J W Parish, J Phillips, M Price, M Rayner, J A Shaw, D R Sheppard, M J Stooke, P W Wooldridge, M J Wrench and G C Yarranton.

C.24 Prayers

Prayers were said by Reverend Jan Ashton, St. Barnabas Church, Franche, Kidderminster.

C.25 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A M Sewell.

C.26 Declarations of Interests by Members

There were no declarations of interests.

C.27 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 18th June 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

C.28 Public Participation

There was no public participation.

C.29 Questions

Council had received two questions.

Question from Councillor N Knowles to The Leader of the Council

The glorious poppy field in the vicinity of Bewdley Road North and the Bewdley by-pass is a major tourist attraction, particularly for increasing

numbers of young Japanese. This year the poppy field is patchy. I conversed with Worcestershire Wildlife Trust (WWT) in 2013 and they suggested they would interfere with the growing of the poppy field to perhaps stagger or stunt the covering of the field with poppies. Could the leader use his influence at District and County level to stop WWT from interfering with nature's cycle and risking the loss of tourists to our area who particularly visit Bewdley.

Response from the Leader of the Council

Of course, Wyre Forest is no stranger to poppies at the moment, I am sure colleagues and member of the public gallery and people watching at home will have noticed the excellent displays of poppies in Brintons Park and on the ringroad network which is an excellent tribute to the work of our grounds maintenance and parks and garden teams so poppies are something we are used to in Wyre Forest. In terms of the location Councillor Knowles refers to, I think a lot of other people as opposed to Japanese visit the location and like colleagues in this Chamber observe the beautiful poppies. Until Councillor Knowles asked this question, I wasn't specifically aware that the WWT had as you say in your question interfered in the poppy fields, and I'm not sure it's something for me in my capacity as leader to interfere in and I'm sure they know better than I do on the growing cycles of poppies and any influence they wish to have will be in discussion with the land owner and I'm sure for the overall benefit of the community.

Supplementary question from Councillor N Knowles

Thank you. I'm rather disappointed because as the Leader of the Council and County Councillor as you are, I would have hoped that you would have made an appropriate comment to the appropriate body you thought to be the case, because the trouble with experts is they have to interfere in everything, i.e. top of trees going and suggesting taking it out already. Could you not just have a word in the right place, I know it's a private field and I know the WWT have got their own agenda but personally I think a word from you would go along way to encourage the other parties to leave the poppies alone and let them flourish and then we would continue to enjoy the poppy field and gain the Japanese tourists.

Supplementary answer from the Leader of the Council

I will see what I can do but I'm not one for talking poppycock.

Question from Councillor J A Shaw to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration

Given that the Planning Enforcement workload on 8th July was reported to be 143 cases, does the Portfolio Holder consider that the current resources to carry out this function, one officer, are sufficient to provide a satisfactory service?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration

First of all I don't recognise or the professional officers don't recognise the number of 143 cases as quoted in the question but getting down to the nub of it whether or not I believe the Council has allocated adequate resources in that area, yes I do.

Supplementary question from Councillor J A Shaw

I wonder if the portfolio holder would give me the commitment that he talks to the officer concerned as I have done, when I said it was only 143 cases which is the number on the agenda of the Planning Committee on 8th July but when I spoke to the officer he said it's not 143 it's 160, could you please give the commitment you will follow that up.

Supplementary answer from the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration

I don't need the request of the Leader of the Labour Party to ask me to speak to one of our officers who I have regular contact with as I do with the Development Manager and the relevant director, this is an important part of the Council's function and I am well aware of the activity. As reported in the report that the Planning Committee received dated 8th July 2014, there were 118 live cases of which only 30 are holding over from 2013 and we are having a very good success rate of 60% closure rate on a month by month basis. This does also lead to a lack of understanding as to how this particular area of work operates, we don't have stand alone officers working in isolation, you have the whole team working to support our planning enforcement policy, so therefore I don't think we have a lack of resources, I think we have through development in this area and through systems thinking being introduced we are seeing a much wider pool of people to further assist this and backed up by statistics, 60% of cases being closed on a month by month basis which I understand is a fairly decent performance.

C.30 Chairman's Communications

The Council received a list of functions attended by the Chairman or Vice-Chairman since the Council's last meeting.

The Chairman referred Members to the separate sheet and advised that the Chairman's Civic Service would be held at St Cassians Church in Chaddesley Corbett in the form of an advent carol service on 30th November 2014.

C.31 Leader's Announcements and Report

The Leader of the Council referred to his tabled report and advised Members of the following:

- The planning application for the Hoobrook Link Road had secured all funding for the second phase.
- There had been a recent strike in local government on 10th July 2014 where 9 staff had not attended work but no Council services had been affected.
- Majority of Council staff had agreed a 4-year pay deal which bought them out of the national agreement but 49 staff members had not signed up to it.
- There would be an Appointments and Appeals Committee on 31st July 2014 to agree the terms of reference for the management review.
- The Council had received £62,000 from the Government under the Bellwin Scheme as a result of the flooding in February 2014.
- The display of poppies in Brintons Park, Kidderminster and the Queen Elizabeth gardens in Bewdley had both received a green flag award and all staff involved were congratulated.

C.32 Motions Submitted under Standing Orders

There were no motions submitted.

C.33 Urgent Motions Submitted under Standing Orders

There were no urgent motions submitted.

C.34 May 2014 Elections and the Polling Districts and Polling Places Review

Council considered a report from The (Local) Returning Officer for May's Elections and Electoral Registration Officer on the May 2014 elections and asked for agreement of the terms of reference and process for the review of polling districts and polling places to be used for the May 2015 elections.

The Cabinet Member for Resources and Transformation advised Members that the review could not begin until the results were known of the boundary review on 23rd September 2014 and it was proposed to extend the lifespan of the cross party working group which would support the review and recommendations would be made to Council in December 2014.

In response to a Member query, the Chief Executive advised that each year there were a number of postal votes received back where information had not been completed correctly, i.e. no signature, incorrect date of birth or the postal vote statement had not been returned and therefore 207 letters had been issued to postal voters informing them of this information and asking for a new application form to be completed.

A Member stated that the figures showed a marked increase in voting and this was good to see.

Decision:

1. **The report on the European Parliamentary, Wyre Forest District Council and Bewdley Town Council elections held on 22 May 2014 be noted.**
2. **The Terms of Reference for the Polling Districts and Polling Places Review as set out in Appendix 2 of the report to Council be approved.**
3. **Delegated authority be granted to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources and Transformation and the Cross Party Working Group for the Electoral Review, to publish consultation proposals and commence the Polling Districts and Polling Places Review in accordance with the timetable set out in paragraph 4.4 of the report to Council.**
4. **The lifespan of the Cross Party Working Group for the Electoral Review accordingly, in order to support the delivery of the Polling Districts and Polling Places Review be expanded.**

C.35 Pay Policy Statement and Pensions Discretions

Council considered a report from the Solicitor to the Council which recommended that Council adopted an updated version of the Pay Policy Statement.

Members were pleased to note that the Council supported the living wage.

In response to a Members query, the Leader of the Council advised that the Chief Executive was not a member of the Appointment and Appeals Committee and would not be present at the meeting. He would participate in the proposed management review in his role as Head of Paid Service.

It was confirmed that the Council did not pay any bonuses or performance related pay to chief officers. However, in certain circumstances returning officers fees were paid but not in respect of district elections.

Decision:

1. **The updated pay policy statement attached as Appendix 1 to the report to Council for the financial year 2014-15 and each subsequent financial year (until it is amended by Council) be approved.**
2. **The delegations to the Appointment and Appeals Committee as amended in the statement be approved.**

3. **The statement of policy on discretionary powers in respect of pensions as set out in Appendix 2 of the report to Council to take immediate effect be adopted.**

C.36 Policy And Budget Framework – Matters which require a decision by Council

- a. **Recommendation from Planning Committee, 8th July 2014**
 - **Proposed Changes to Development Control Procedure and Protocols**

Decision: The proposed changes to the Officer Scheme of Delegation and the Pre-Application and Permitted Development Charges, in accordance with paragraphs 10.4 and 10.5 of the report to Planning Committee be approved.

- b. **Recommendation from the Notice of Decision of Cabinet Member (Strong Leader), 19th June 2014**

- **2013/14 Right to Buy Receipts (RBS)**

In response to a Member question, it was confirmed that the Council had set a budget of £800,000 for disabled facilities grants in 2014-15, which it was intended to fund from right to buy monies topping up government grant.

Decision: The 2013/14 Right to Buy Receipts (RTB) from Community Housing Group of £205,750 be allocated to Disabled Facilities Grant (DFGs) in the 2014/15 Capital Programme, as detailed in paragraph 4.11 of the Strong Leader report.

- c. **Recommendations from Cabinet, 22nd July 2014**

- **Maximising the Value of Council Property Assets**

A discussion took place and some Members felt that this was far too important an item for the Cabinet to make a decision and that it should be reported to Council for the final decision. There were also concerns that the report should be presented to the Audit Committee.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration pointed out that the report had been presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and any Member was welcome to attend a Cabinet meeting.

Upon a vote, the decision was carried.

Decision: The allocation of capital receipts from the sale of the land and buildings identified at paragraph 2.2 in the confidential report to Cabinet be agreed, to create an 'evergreen' fund to support future investment opportunities in developments that deliver further receipts for disposal or return on investment; that delegated approval be given to Cabinet to agree the appropriate investments upon which to spend such investment fund monies; and that delegation be granted to Cabinet to decide to add any future capital receipts to the evergreen investment fund as they deem appropriate.

C.37 Any Other Business

Recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 23rd July 2014

- **Review of Worcestershire Hub Satellite Offices at Stourport-on-Severn and Bewdley**

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee advised Council that at their meeting on 23rd July 2014, a call in had been received which asked to review the Strong Leader Decision of the closure of the hubs in Stourport-on-Severn and Bewdley. There had been a lot of debate at the meeting and some of the concerns included there had been a lack of communication and consultation, the effect it would have on the quality of services and whether the hub needed a total revision. She then proposed to Council that the Cabinet Member for Resources and Transformation be asked to reconsider the decision on the closure of the hubs in Stourport-on-Severn and Bewdley.

A robust debate ensued and some of the points included:

- The hubs stay open for between one and two years and then it be reviewed on the understanding that if the hubs were not used, they close.
- A Member asked for details on how many members of the public visited Wyre Forest House.
- What effect would the closures of the two hubs have on the Kidderminster Hub which was already very busy?
- Not all members of the public had access to or could use a computer.
- The hub in Stourport-on-Severn could be located in the Civic Centre which would open shortly.

- The hub in Stourport-on-Severn had moved several times in two years and people had become unsure as to where it was located and this could be part of the reason why attendance had reduced.

The Cabinet Member for Resources and Transformation responded that the decision was not political. The Council had to reduce its expenditure by over £2m between 2013 and 2016 and as part of the budget process, Council had agreed in November 2013 that this area had to make savings of £213,000. Part of the decision had come from losing funding from Worcestershire County Council. The number of people that used the two hubs had reduced and it was therefore no longer viable to keep the hubs open.

A named vote on the proposal was lost. This was recorded as follows:

For: G W Ballinger, C Brewer, A Clent, E Davies, B T Glass, V Higgs, J Holden, L Hyde, M B Kelly, N Knowles, R Lloyd, B McFarland, C D Nicholls, J Parish, M Rayner, J A Shaw, D R Sheppard, M Stooke, P Wooldridge and M Wrench.

Against: J Aston, R Bishop, J-P Champion, S J M clee, N J Desmond, H E Dyke, P Dyke, D R Godwin, J Greener, P B Harrison, J Hart, M J Hart, P V Hayward, A T Hingley, F M Oborski, T Onslow, J Phillips, M Price, C Rogers, S J Williams and G C Yarranton.

Decision: Upon a named vote, a motion to invite the Cabinet member to reconsider the decision was defeated.

The meeting ended at 8.10 pm.