

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER**

**10TH DECEMBER 2014 (6PM)**

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**Present:**

Councillors: S J Williams (Chairman), C Rogers (Vice-Chairman), J Aston, G W Ballinger, R Bishop, C Brewer, J-P Campion, 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, A M Sewell, J A Shaw, D R Sheppard, M J Stooke, P Wooldridge, M J Wrench and G C Yarranton.

**C.51 Prayers**

Prayers were said by Pastor Rob Palmer of Franche Evangelical Church, Kidderminster.

**C.52 Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence

**C.53 Declarations of Interests by Members**

There were no declarations of interest.

**C.54 Minutes**

**Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

**C.55 Public Participation**

One member of the public had registered to speak to act as spokesman for a number of traders located in Worcester Street, Prospect Hill and Coventry Street, Kidderminster. He addressed Council as follows:

“Good evening ladies and gentlemen, my name is Russ Kelsall and I am here tonight as the spokesman for a number of traders located in Worcester Street, Prospect Hill and Coventry Street.

As a group we feel let down, frustrated and amazed in how the streets we are all located in have been neglected for the last 10 plus years.

For the last 5 years or so I have been involved with the town centre partnership to try to influence and support the town centre as much as possible, but for all the time I have spent in meetings nothing has been done to improve these streets !

In July this year I and two other retailers had a meeting with Marcus Hart and John Campion to discuss our concerns and to try to find out if the council had any plans for improvements to these streets in the near future - to say we all left feeling frustrated and fobbed off would be an understatement!

In the last couple of months since then we have spent time being interviewed by the local press, radio and being part of email discussions with certain members of the council, trying to raise the plight of these streets but have we got anywhere - NO !

So recently we have been in discussion with a couple of members of the council who have been interested in listening to our issues, they have tried to help, hence why I am here tonight to appeal to all of you, the entire members of the Wyre Forest council for help and support and the weight of action and votes to get something done for these streets sooner rather than later -

In short we have issues with

The poor state of the Christmas lights.

Damaged safety bollards and bicycle shelter which have been waiting for repair for well over a year.

The lack of any flower tubs / hanging baskets in Worcester street this year.

Lack of on street parking - and why did the on street parking that had been planned to be done within Worcester Street get cancelled?

Business rates historically high, and are overdue to be recalculated.

It appears as if Worcester Street and other areas have been, and continue to be purposely neglected - why?

In the Express and Star on the 27th of November John Campion is quoted as saying that he hoped to make an announcement early in the new year as to when work may commence on the phase for improvements to Worcester street - for the business holders involved can you please give us an early Christmas present and give us some good news as to when we can expect this to happen - or is just more mere words and you have no idea as to when work will start ?

Worcester street is currently used by lorries, delivery trucks, vans, cars, fire engines, bin wagons etc etc, if it safe for these vehicles to do so, and we have been told the road surface is more than adequate for these vehicles to go up and down, why can't the street be opened up in the short term without the road surface being replaced, just get the signage and road markings put in place and get traffic moving along the street - it will cost a

fraction of the reported price of one million.

What is happening with Crown House? Why has it been possible to discuss a 5 year lease if the unit is due to be demolished?

In Summary, so from what I have just explained here tonight, you can see there are a number of questions that need to be asked and answers sought - and most importantly there are business's within the town that need supporting, not ignoring - please, please hear us, and support us!"

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration thanked the public speaker for his comments and advised that the Council had carried out extensive consultation on the public realm in Kidderminster and the results had been displayed in the former T J Hughes building. The value of the project was £2m which had been funded by the Council and £1.5m by Worcestershire County Council. Phase 2 would see an extension of Weavers Wharf through to Lower Mill Street and the demolition of Crown House. The third phase would see one way traffic introduced in Worcester Street and on street parking but there was no funding in place at present. The Council had taken significant steps to support traders through the Empty Grant Scheme and had offered free parking and cultural activities.

**C.56**

**Questions**

Council received two questions which had been submitted in accordance with Standing Order A5 by Members of the Council.

**Question from Councillor N Knowles to the Leader of the Council**

The Chairman has refused me, for the second Council meeting running, to ask a Question of the Leader after he gave his announcements. Which rule is it that precludes a Member questioning the Leader on his announcements?

It ought to be a democratic right. My question was, as I indicated, a seven word question "When will the link road be finished?" I respectfully ask whether, in future, the Leader will agree to take questions on his announcements.

**Answer from the Leader of the Council**

The short answer is no. I'm a little surprised you have now asked the question in this way, and to be fair to you, you have the jist of how the constitution works. The constitution clearly sets out leaders announcements and they are to receive those announcements. The decision of the Chairman, who I fully support as a fair chair of this chamber is final.

**Supplementary Question from Councillor N Knowles**

I am disappointed but not entirely surprised, seem scared of taking questions on report. Do you think we could change the constitution and so we could ask questions, County Council and other councils take questions,

even the Chief Executive takes questions?

**Supplementary Answer from the Leader of the Council**

Thank you but you are missing the point, this is not a report, it's a suite of announcements, in my County Cabinet role, I take questions and the Chief Executive here does a report twice a year. These are announcements but please ask questions in the appropriate way.

**Question from Councillor N Knowles to the Leader of the Council**

Would the Leader of the Council tell me if he still supports Kidderminster having its own elected Town Council and if he is prepared to use his office to help achieve it?

**Answer from the Leader of the Council**

I don't know if I did support or not. I don't think it's for us to dictate to the good people of Kidderminster who can make their own mind up. My position is clear and consistent, I support the democratic right of every single elector in Kidderminster to have their say, yes or no. We will be talking about this at agenda item number 14 of the report.

**Supplementary Question from Councillor N Knowles**

I notice his job is not to dictate but to advocate. Just thought the Leader of the Council was advocating for a Kidderminster Town Council.

**Supplementary Answer from the Leader of the Council**

Not sure what to say to that, other than not for me to advocate.

**C.57 Chairman's Communications**

The Council received a list of functions attended by the Chairman or Vice-Chairman since the Council's last meeting. He thanked his vice-chairman for his support and thanked Members who had attended the Civic service on 30<sup>th</sup> November. He also thanked all members and staff for their contributions to the foodbank appeal. He advised Members that he would be holding a Winter Warmer charity event at Rowberrys Nursery on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2015 and entertainment would be provided by the Kidderminster Male Voice Choir with tickets priced at £12.50.

**C.58 Leader's Announcements and Report**

The Leader of the Council referred Members to his report and reported the excellent work done by Kay Higman for securing a £2m grant for the new leisure centre.

There would be two sets of tenants moving into Wyre Forest House and thanks were given to Alison Braithwaite and her team for all the work involved. The local government settlement announcement was awaited.

**C.59 Motions Submitted Under Standing Order No. D1 (1)**

One motion had been received in accordance with Standing Order D1(1).

From Councillor J Shaw, Leader of the Labour Group.

“Council concerned that the average workplace wage in Wyre Forest is below the national average, and mindful of the example set by Salford City’s Charter for Employment Standards, resolves to convene meetings with local employers and trade unions, in order to discuss ways in which remuneration could be increased towards, and ultimately attain, the level of the Living Wage.”

Councillor Shaw presented his motion and advised Council that this referred to the average wage of people that worked in the Wyre Forest area and not household remuneration.

A robust and lengthy debate took place. Some members felt that the Council should take the initiative and help to create job opportunities for people.

There were concerns that people were being made to travel to work outside of the area because of no work locally and it was up to local Councillors to do the best for people. The average wage in the Wyre Forest area was perceived to be £17,000 per annum which was lower than the national average wage.

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee advised Council that an item on poverty had been added to the work programme and would be presented to the March committee. It was possible that there could be recommendations to Council.

**Decision:**

**The following motion from Councillor J Shaw, Leader of the Labour Group not be agreed:**

***Council concerned that the average workplace wage in Wyre Forest is below the national average, and mindful of the example set by Salford City’s Charter for Employment Standards, resolves to convene meetings with local employers and trade unions, in order to discuss ways in which remuneration could be increased towards, and ultimately attain, the level of the Living Wage.***

**C.60 Urgent Motions Submitted Under Standing Order No. D1 (7)**

No notices of motions were received in accordance with Standing Order D1(1).

**C.61 Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places**

Council considered a report from the Chief Executive which asked Council to agree changes to the Polling Places and Polling Districts.

The Leader of the Council led Members through the report and advised he was pleased with the consultation response and that the proposals would lead to a reduction of six polling stations which in turn would save money. It was hoped that many electors would still vote on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2015 and there was an option of having a postal/proxy vote if they felt their polling station was too far away.

Councillor J-P Campion left the meeting at this point, 19.26pm and returned at 19.26pm.

Councillor P Dyke left the meeting at this point, 19.28pm and returned at 19.30pm.

Council held a robust debate. Several amendments to retain or provide additional polling places were moved as follows

- a. Walshes Community Hall (AK-B) (moved by Councillor J Shaw, seconded by Councillor V Higgs).

The Leader of the Labour Group proposed to retain the Walshes Community Hall and advised that the hall was not under threat of closure and had had money spent on it recently.

Councillor L Hyde left the meeting at this point, 19.33pm and returned at 19.36pm.

It was felt that the access to the proposed polling station was not adequate and the walking distance would be doubled.

- b. St John's Church Hall, Habberley (moved by Councillor N Knowles, seconded by Councillor B McFarland).

Councillor V Higgs left the meeting at this point, (19.48pm).

An amendment was presented by The Labour Group that the status quo be maintained at St. Johns Church Hall and that all residents be allowed to vote at that polling station. A petition of 400 signatures was handed in which had been signed by residents of the Habberley area.

Councillor V Higgs returned to the meeting at this point, (19.50pm).

It was felt that the proposed polling station was too far away for residents and people would be denied their vote.

Councillors D Godwin and D Sheppard left the meeting at this point, (19.56pm). Councillor D Godwin returned at 19.57pm and D Godwin returned at 19.59pm.

It was pointed out that the previously used Worcestershire County Council building was still taking bookings. It was felt that there would be chaos in the car park at the Gainsborough Hotel and people would struggle to cross the main road to get to the polling station.

Councillor G Yarranton left the meeting at this point, (20.16pm).

- c. St Oswald's School, Sion Hill (BR-B) (moved by Councillor M Rayner, seconded by Councillor A Sewell).

It was proposed to continue using St Oswald's School on Sion Hill as people would have to cross a busy main road and a very steep hill to navigate, making it difficult for electors to vote at the new polling station.

Councillor G Yarranton came back to the meeting at this point, (20.18pm).

- d. The Y Centre, Rifle Range Community Centre (OL-A1) (moved by Councillor M Wrench, seconded by Councillor P Wooldridge).

The Leader of UKIP asked for The Y Centre to be retained as a polling station.

Councillor M B Kelly left the meeting at this point, (20.33pm).

The polling station was in the heart of the community and residents should not be sent down a busy road to cast their vote.

In response, it was confirmed that this polling station was no longer viable to be used as turnout figures were very low and had not improved over the years. No responses had been received from residents on the closure of this location.

Councillors J Hart and M Stooke left the meeting at this point, (20.57pm).

- e. Old Rose and Crown Public House, Stourport-on-Severn (MI-B) (moved by Councillor J Holden, seconded by Councillor P Wooldridge).

It was proposed that the polling station be retained at the Old Rose & Crown Public House as there was a large electorate that voted at this location.

Councillor L Hyde left the meeting at this point, (20.58pm).

Councillor J Hart returned to the meeting at this point, (20.58pm).

There had been no complaints from this location being used as a polling station and people could walk to the venue and use it also for social gatherings. The new tenant had also agreed that he was prepared to reduce the fee charged for the premises.

Councillor Stooke came back to the meeting at this point, (21.01pm).

Councillor B T Glass left the meeting at this point, (21.01pm).  
Councillor L Hyde came back to the meeting at this point, (21.02pm).  
Councillor B T Glass came back to the meeting at this point,  
(21.03pm).

- f. Wilden Village Hall (MI-C) (moved by Councillor D Sheppard, seconded by Councillor V Higgs).

It was proposed to keep Wilden Village Hall as a polling station as the distance to St Wulstans Community Centre was much too far. Wilden Village Hall was used by many elderly electors and although there were not many electors that voted at this place, it was a busy station. In addition, it was stated that there were busy roads to cross and there were no bus stops until you reached Mitton Street.

- g. Other Polling Place Proposals Received

It was proposed to use the Odell Centre, Park Street, Kidderminster as a polling station (moved by Councillor M Wrench, seconded by Councillor M Stooke).

Councillor M Rayner left the meeting at this point, (21.20pm).

The location has been used in the past and the Elections Team had visited the site and the facilities were deemed fit for purpose.

Councillor M Rayner came back to the meeting at this point, (21.23pm).

Councillor P Wooldridge left the meeting at this point, (21.23pm).

It was felt that the Odell Centre would be more a suitable venue for the residents in the area.

Councillor P Wooldridge came back to the meeting at this point, (21.26pm).

The centre had only just been reopened after the building being closed for many years. It was confirmed that the electors of SP-A1 and SP-A2 could use the Odell Centre instead of the Evangelical Church in Greatfield Road.

Councillor P B Harrison left the meeting at this point, (21.38pm).

Councillor J Parish advised Council that the proposed Stourport Working Mens Club location was landlocked and had no public right of way, it was private ground and it was considered that this was an unsuitable venue. It was confirmed that the Working Mens Club were willing for the venue to be used as a polling station but this would be double checked.

Councillor P B Harrison came back to the meeting at this point, (21.41pm).



A vote was taken on each amendment and the result on each occasion of the named vote was:

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

Against: Councillors: J Aston, R Bishop, J-P Campion, 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 Yarranton.

On each occasion, the Chairman exercised his casting vote against the amendment and the amendment therefore fell.

**Decision: The polling districts and polling places set out in the chart at paragraph 4.5 of the report to Council be agreed to be used with effect from the elections in May 2015.**

There was a short comfort break at this point, (21.49pm) and Members returned at 21.58pm.

Councillors A Clent and B T Glass left the meeting at this point, (21.49pm).

#### **C.62 The Future Governance of Kidderminster**

A report was considered from the Chief Executive which asked Council to agree various matters relating to the Community Governance Review of Kidderminster, which is to commence on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2015.

Members were taken through the report and advised that a report would be presented to the February 2015 Council meeting.

Councillors G Ballinger, P Hayward, J Greener, P Harrison, McFarland, C Nicholls, F Oborski, M Rayner, M Stooke and G Yarranton came back to the meeting at this point (21.59pm).

**Decision:**

- 1. The terms of reference for the review in Appendix 1 of the report to Council be agreed.**
- 2. The question to be asked in the local advisory poll on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2015, together with the franchise and other procedural rules for the local poll, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report to Council be agreed.**

#### **C.63 Corporate Governance**

Council considered a report from the Solicitor to the Council which asked Council to agree the revised political balance.

**Decision: The revised political balance of the Council as set out in Appendix 1 of the report be agreed.**

Councillor J Holden came back to the meeting at this point, (22.03pm).

**C.64 Independent Remuneration Panel Report for 2015/16 Onward**

The Leader of the Council took Members through the report and were advised that work has been carried out by a new Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) and although he did not agree with all the recommendations, he asked Council to accept them so the Council could start afresh with the reduction of Councillors in May 2015. Members were reminded that in addition to the savings that the IRP recommendations would make, additional savings of £37K would be made with the reduction of councillors.

A debate ensued and it was proposed that the report be presented to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee but this proposal was later withdrawn.

Councillor J Holden left the meeting at this point, (22.26pm).

**Decision:**

- 1. That regard should be had to the conclusions and recommendations of the IRP in making any amendments to the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2015/16.**
- 2. The Panel's recommendations for basic allowances and special responsibility allowances for the municipal year 2015/16, coming into effect on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2015 be adopted.**
- 3. The basic and special responsibility allowances should be increased by an index for the years commencing 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 and 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018. The index to be used shall be the Consumer Prices Index as published by the Office for National Statistics for the month of January immediately prior to the financial year in question.**
- 4. The Dependent Carer's Allowance be extended to include an elderly relative or disabled person who resides with a councillor and cannot be left alone.**
- 5. The mileage allowance at 40p per mile be maintained.**
- 6. The Council's Solicitor be authorised to amend the Constitution as appropriate to give effect to the Council's decisions.**

**C.65 Policy and Budget Framework**

Matters which require a Decision by Council.

**a. Recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

- **Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy Mid Year Report 2014/15**

**Decision: The mid-year review and updated Prudential Indicators be approved.**

**b. Recommendations from Licensing & Environmental Committee 8<sup>th</sup> December 2014**

- **Licensing Act 2003 Review of Statement of Licensing Policy**

**Decision: The revised Statement of Licensing Policy attached at Appendix 1 of the report to the Licensing & Environmental Committee be approved and published with effect from 11<sup>th</sup> December 2014.**

The meeting ended at 22.32 pm.