

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
CABINET**

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER
22ND NOVEMBER 2016 (6.00 PM)**

Present:

Councillors: M J Hart (Chairman), N J Desmond, S E Fearn, I Hardiman, M J Hart, J D Smith and R J Vale.

Observers:

Councillors: H E Dyke, N Knowles and F M Oborski MBE.

CAB.38 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

CAB.39 Declarations of Interests by Members

No declarations of interest were made.

CAB.40 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the Cabinet meetings held on 13th September 2016 and 4th October 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CAB.41 Call Ins

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

CAB.42 Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There were no items requiring urgent attention.

CAB.43 Council Tax Reduction Scheme Review 2017/18

A report was considered from the Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Manager, which provided information following the consultation to make changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2017/18.

The Cabinet Member for Transformation and Change led Members through the report. She advised Members that the Council was obliged to review the Council Tax Reduction Scheme annually and that in 2015 Cabinet was minded not to make any significant changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme in the short term, which still stood.

The Cabinet Member for Transformation and Change clarified that the Government had made changes to Housing Benefit Regulations and how benefits were calculated to bring them in line with Universal Credit. She emphasised that if the Council did not mirror the Government changes, it would have a negative impact for the Council, namely increased complexity for Council Officers in administering the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, and the certainty that more households would be eligible for Council Tax support and thus lead the Council to incur extra costs.

The Cabinet Member for Transformation and Change emphasised that no changes would be made to the exception for additional earnings as it did not comply with the Council's agreed principle of incentivising people to work. She added that the consultation responses received had been in overwhelming support for the proposals, as were the Overview and Scrutiny Committee who were one of the consultees.

The Leader of the Council reiterated that Cabinet were not planning on changing the scheme in a fundamental way and were not changing the maximum percentage contribution. He highlighted that the proposals were in response to the changes made by Government.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee confirmed that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to the proposed changes to the scheme and thanked the Officers involved for their detailed explanations at the Committee meeting.

Decision:

Recommended to Council:

From April 2017 the technical changes to align the scheme with housing benefit, tax credits and Universal Credit outlined in paragraph 3.4 of the report to Cabinet are adopted in the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

CAB.44 Write off of Amounts Outstanding

A report was considered from the Chief Financial Officer which considered writing off the sum of £65,881.52 in respect of debts that could not be collected.

The Cabinet Member for Resources led Members through the report and stressed that every effort had been made to pursue the debts, which related to non-domestic rates. He emphasised that the write offs would be accounted for as part of the Worcestershire Business Rates Pool.

The Leader of the Council added that the Council rigorously pursued bad debtors and only write off debts when there was no realistic prospect of recovery.

Decision:

The total of £65,881.52, as detailed in the Appendices to the report to Cabinet, be written off.

CAB.45 Parish Support Fund Proposals

A report was considered from the Chief Financial Officer which presented proposals for the future of Parish Support Fund payments following consultation with all Parish and Town Councils on options to phase out support to contribute towards the significant budget funding gap faced by the Council.

The Cabinet Member for Resources led Members through the report and explained that in 2013-14 the Government made changes to the Council Tax benefit system, the impact of which was the reduction of the Council Tax Base. Funding to compensate the Parish and Town Councils of £66,000 was identified as part of the Finance Settlement in 2013-14. He highlighted that the Council had continued to provide a Shortfall Grant to Town and Parish Councils for the past four years.

The Cabinet Member for Resources further explained that given the funding gap faced by the Council it was no longer viable to continue with the Support Grant. He confirmed that consultation had taken place with all Parish and Town Councils, with two options as set out in 5.1 of the report to Cabinet. He added that a phased approach was proposed to allow the Parish and Town Councils time to factor the funding change into their budget processes. The change would save £125,000 over the next Medium Term Financial Strategy.

He added that the Council's ongoing work Parish and Town Councils would include the promotion of the separate Parish Localism Fund, that stands at £50,000 in the 2016/17 budget.

The Leader of the Council added that this was a very fair proposal which the Town and Parish Councils had all been consulted on at a very early stage so that the Councils were aware of what the position would be for their budgeting purposes over the next few years.

Decision:

The proposal for the phasing out of Parish Support Fund as set out in paragraph 11 of the report to Cabinet be approved

CAB.46 Report on the Provision of Temporary Accommodation

A report was considered from the Strategic Housing Services Manager which sought approval for 2-3 New Street, Stourport to be brought back into use for temporary accommodation and for the necessary adjustment to the Capital Programme to finance the project.

The Cabinet Member for Health Well-being and Housing led Members through the report and explained although the property had been empty for some years and was in need of some refurbishment it has the potential to support the Council's need for temporary accommodation to meet its obligations under the Housing Act 1996.

The Cabinet Member for Health Well-being and Housing explained that most households placed in emergency accommodation were re-housed temporarily in Bed and Breakfast accommodation, but on occasions more expensive accommodation has had to be used and the Council had experienced difficulty in finding private sector providers willing to take on this service due to the impact of Welfare Reform which had made it less financially attractive to private landlords to provide this type of accommodation. She added that Bed and Breakfast accommodation was also used by members of the public and therefore could result in nothing being available meaning the Council would have to seek other more costly options out of the district which could potentially expose the Council to legal challenge

The Cabinet Member for Health Well-being and Housing continued that Officers have considered alternative proposals than the use of temporary accommodation, including the alternative of borrowing the capital to finance the project, the “do-nothing” proposal and converting the property into bedroom flats for rent. These alternatives were ruled out as they were not financially advantageous to the Council. She continued that the proposal not only allowed the Council to fulfil its duty under the Housing Act 1996, it would allow an annual income of £44,200 in 2018/19 and £41,200 in 2019/20, thus provided a solid income stream for the future.

The Leader of the Council welcomed the report and congratulated the Housing Services Manager and her team for their hard work in compiling a sound, multi-faceted business case.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee congratulated the Officers for looking “outside the box” and commented that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had received the report with positivity and enthusiasm; and were happy to support the recommendation.

The Leader of the Council added that as the property is a Grade 2 Listed Building, it would require listed building consent and the application would be considered by the Planning Committee in due course.

Decision;

In line with the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 3rd November 2016

- 1 The conversion of 2-3 New Street, Stourport for the provision of temporary accommodation be approved.**
- 2 The conversion of 2-3 New Street, Stourport for the provision of temporary accommodation be approved.**

- 3 **Delegated Authority be granted to the Director of Economic Prosperity & Place, in consultation with Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Wellbeing to put in place all necessary consents associated with the conversion works, to implement the works themselves and to commission the delivery of services from the building once the works are complete.**

- 4 **Delegated Authority be granted to the Director of Economic Prosperity & Place, in consultation with Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Wellbeing to put in place all necessary consents associated with the conversion works, to implement the works themselves and to commission the delivery of services from the building once the works are complete.**

Recommended to Council:

The Capital Programme be amended accordingly to accommodate the costs associated with the conversion works.

CAB.47 Recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 3rd November 2016

- **Wyre Forest District Local Plan Review: Revised Local Development Scheme (Project Plan 2016 - 2019)**

The recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3rd November 2016 were considered. The Chairman of the Local Plans Review Panel commented that the Housing and Planning Act 2016 made it necessary for the Council to demonstrate it had a 5 year housing land supply. The Panel were confident that the authority had a robust 5 year land supply which would stand up to thorough scrutiny and thanked Officers for their superb support.

Decision:

The proposed Revised Local Development Scheme 2016-19 (November 2016) as set out in Appendix 1 of the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, be adopted.

CAB.48 Exclusion of Press and Public

Decision: "Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of "exempt information" as defined in paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

CAB.49 Industrial Units Investment Business Case

A report was considered from the Head of North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration which asked Cabinet to agree the outline business case for the Council to proceed with purchasing land, to facilitate the construction of small industrial units and for the necessary adjustment to the Capital Programme to finance the project; and to proceed with the project subject to the satisfactory completion of a detailed business case.

All members who were present spoke in favour of the proposal and thanks were extended to officers for the work that had gone into developing the proposal.

In line with the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 3rd November 2016

Decision:

- 1 To agree to the outline business case for the purchase of land at the site identified in the exempt report to Cabinet and subsequent construction of industrial units.**
- 2 Delegated authority be granted to the Director of Economic Prosperity & Place, in consultation with the Chief Financial Officer, Solicitor to the Council and Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration to:**
 - (i) Finalise and approve the detailed business case for the purchase of the land and construction of the industrial units;**

And subject to agreeing the detailed business case to:

- (ii) Ensure that all appropriate legal agreements are put in place in advance of the Council purchasing the land;**
- (iii) Ensure that the appointment of a contractor to develop the units is procured in line with the Council's contract procedure rules;**
- (iv) Subject to (ii) and (iii), to complete all necessary documentation to acquire the land on which blocks 2 and 3 and associated parking shown on the plan attached to the report to Cabinet are to be constructed together with all necessary access rights;**
- (v) Ensure that appropriate Project Management controls are put in place to oversee the delivery of the scheme and ensure that it is delivered on time and within budget.**

Recommended to Council:

The Capital Programme be amended accordingly to accommodate the purchase of the land and construction of the industrial units together with the requisite revisions to the revenue budget as set out in the detail of Appendix 3 of the report to Cabinet.

CAB.50 Amendments to Capital Programme

A report was considered from the Director of Economic Prosperity and Place which proposed amendments to the capital programme arising from current and recent development schemes in Kidderminster, including confirmation of the cost of demolition of the Glades, and asked Cabinet to recommend the amendments to Council in December.

Decision:

Recommended to Council:

The Capital Programme be updated as detailed in the exempt report to Cabinet.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 7.05 pm.