

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER

THURSDAY, 2ND MARCH 2017 (6PM)

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**Present:**

Councillors: H E Dyke (Chairman), J Baker, R Bishop, J R Desmond, P Dyke, A T Hingley, D Little, S J Walker and S J Williams.

**Observers**

Councillors: I Hardiman, N Knowles, F M Oborski MBE, J A Shaw and J D Smith.

**OS.71 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: M Rayner (Vice-Chairman), N Gale and K Henderson.

**OS.72 Appointment of Substitutes**

Councillor J Baker was a substitute for Councillor K Henderson.  
Councillor R Bishop was a substitute for Councillor N Gale.

**OS.73 Declarations of Interests by Members**

No declarations of interest were made.

**OS.74 Minutes**

**Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd February 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

**OS.75 Worcestershire Partnership Plan**

The Committee received a report from the Strategic Housing Services Manager which set out the consultation responses and amendments to the Worcestershire Housing Partnership Plan that had been developed by the Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership.

Members were led through the report and considered the different sections of the Plan together with the consultation responses.

A lengthy and robust discussion ensued with a range of topics being debated including: the District's housing stock, Welfare Reform and the pending introduction of the bed room tax for OAPs in social housing, national and local policy direction, Worcestershire County Council's recent Ofsted inspection of services for children in Worcestershire and reduced levels of Supporting People funding.

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It was agreed to revise the recommendation in the report to reflect some of the key discussion points.

#### **Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet:**

1. **The Worcestershire Housing Partnership Plan be approved.**
2. **That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's concerns about the following areas of The Worcestershire Housing Partnership Plan be noted, for the reasons stated:**
  - a) **The Sustainability and Transformation Plan**  
Members have not received a local briefing yet on this Plan and therefore do not understand how it will support the housing agenda.
  - b) **Care Leavers and the Corporate Parenting Role in Worcestershire**  
Work regarding Care Leavers is not made reference to in the "What Are We Doing Section" of the Plan. This is very concerning given Worcestershire County Council's recent inadequate rating for its Ofsted inspection of services for children in Worcestershire.
  - c) **Supported Housing**  
Due to the reduced levels of supported accommodation which will be available for people with disabilities, following cuts to the Supporting People budget, there needs to be robust monitoring procedures in place as part of the plan to understand the impact of funding cuts.
3. **That the Wyre Forest Clinical Commissioning Group be invited to a future meeting of the Members' Forum to brief Members on the Sustainability and Transformation Plan for this area.**

#### **OS.76 Initiating a Collective Energy Switching Scheme**

The Committee received a report from the Principal Health and Sustainability Officer which sought permission for Wyre Forest District Council to initiate a Collective Energy Switching Scheme (CESS) on behalf of residents.

The Principal Health and Sustainability Officer led Members through the report and explained that Ofgem allow energy companies to offer special tariffs for CESSs and supports them as a way of 'activating' people who are unlikely otherwise to switch. A CESS provides one of the few opportunities energy suppliers have for creating bespoke tariffs. Ofgem promote the involvement of Local Authorities in this process for enabling customers to be helped and supported through the process by an organisation that is already known to them and with whom they have an existing relationship.

A discussion ensued whereby Members reflected on their own experiences of switching energy suppliers and felt this scheme offered an excellent opportunity as long as it was effectively promoted to hard to reach groups and people without internet access. Members were encouraged to provide the Principal Health and

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Sustainability Officer with contact details of community groups whose users may benefit from the scheme. The Principal Health and Sustainability Officer agreed to liaise with iChoosr (the potential switching scheme partner) to see if the length of the fixed rate contract could be increased from one year to two years to encourage more people to switch.

**Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet:**

**To initiate a Collective Energy Switching Scheme on behalf of residents.**

**OS.77**

#### **Worcestershire Local Transport Plan 4**

The Committee considered a report from the Planning Policy Manager which gave an overview of the Worcestershire Local Transport Plan 4 consultation documents.

The Planning Policy Manager led Members through the draft proposed consultation response from this Council which must be submitted to Worcestershire County Council by 17 March, the deadline for responses.

A lengthy and robust discussion ensued with a range of key points being debated including: The timetable for the Mustow Green Junction Enhancement Scheme, Car Parking requirements of Kidderminster Rail Station, Blakedown Rail Station Enhancement and the potential impact on the Green Belt, the poor quality of the District's roads, the future need for some form of Stourport Relief Road, and exploring passenger transport models.

It was agreed to revise the recommendation in the report to reflect the key discussion points.

**Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet:**

- 1. The consultation response, as set out at Appendix 1 of the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, be agreed with the following additions:**
  - a) Mustow Green Junction Enhancement Scheme – to request an early timetable for improving the efficiency of this busy junction.**
  - b) Kidderminster Rail Station– that a full assessment is undertaken of the impact of the growth potential for Kidderminster Station on car parking requirements at the site and network and highway capacity to access the station in the future.**
  - c) Blakedown Rail Station Enhancement –More analysis is required of the impact of enhancing the provision at the station and the advantages and disadvantages that this will have for the settlement and surrounding highway network. In particular there's concern about the potential impact on the Green Belt Land which surrounds the station.**
  - d) Quality of the surface of the District's roads – the poor quality of surface needs addressing.**

- e) **Stourport Relief Road –continued support for at least the partial completion of the Relief Road if the River Severn crossing element is no longer feasible.**
  - f) **Passenger Transport – that alternative delivery models are explored for the provision of bus passenger transport in the district such as community – led schemes.**
2. **The consultation response, as amended, be approved for submission to Worcestershire County Council by the deadline of 17<sup>th</sup> March 2017.**

Councillor FM Oborski left the meeting at 7.22pm.

**OS.78 Annual Crime and Disorder Review 2016/17**

The Committee received a report from the Community Safety and Partnerships Officer which provided an update on the progress of the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership (NWCSP) during 2016/17.

The Community Safety and Partnerships Officer explained the structure of the NWCSP and its statutory duty to produce a three year rolling plan outlining how the partnership intends to address key crime and community safety priorities. It was noted that the vision of the Police and Crime Commissioner, as set out in his Safer West Mercia Plan, will be reflected in the NWCSP plan. The vision focuses on: Building a more secure West Mercia, Reassuring West Mercia's Communities, Putting Victims and Witnesses First and Reforming West Mercia. The funding that the NWCSP currently receives to support its wide ranging programme of initiatives including: Community Ambassadors (which has been shortlisted for a National Award), Safe Place Scheme, Hate Crime, Managing Harm, Domestic Violence and Team Wyre Forest is being reviewed by the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner so it is more outcome focussed.

A discussion ensued around the Crime and ASB data presented for the District for the period April 2016 to January 2017 and in particular the increase in crime which is a Worcestershire trend and not unique to Wyre Forest. The Community Safety and Partnerships Officer confirmed that locally the NWCSP works closely with the Drugs Misuse Service which is funded by Worcestershire County Council and that she wasn't aware of any plans to review the future of PACT meetings but will ask the question at the next partnership meeting.

The Community Safety and Partnerships Officer advised that Inspector James Ashton has recently started as the new policing inspector for the Wyre Forest District and she is due to met with him next week.

The Chairman of the Committee thanked the Community Safety and Partnerships Officer for the comprehensive update.

**Agreed: The progress made by the North Worcestershire CSP be noted.**

**OS. 79 Changes to Community Housing Group Community Member Nominations**

The Committee received a report from the Director of Economic Prosperity & Place

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which advised the Committee of changes that were expected which impact on the Council's approach to nominating Council Members to the Community Member positions on Community Housing Group (CHG).

A robust discussion ensued and several Members expressed concern that without Councillor representation on the Board or other Groups there will be no one to protect the rights of the tenants or hold CHG to account. However other Members who have previously held positions on CHG for the Council felt that their role no longer provided them with the ability to influence change, or effectively represent the tenants due to the changing operating landscape of the Company, which bears little resemblance to when the company was first established.

The Director of Economic Prosperity & Place confirmed that none of the other working practices or policy arrangements that the Council has in place with CHG would change.

The Chairman of the Committee took a vote on the Recommendation to Cabinet that no further nominations to the roles of Community Member are made to any of the vacancies on CHG. Eight Members of the Committee present voted in favour of the recommendation. No Members voted against the Recommendation. However Councillor Peter Dyke abstained from the vote due to being an employee of CHG. The decision was therefore unanimous in support of the Recommendation.

**Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet:**

**That no further nominations to the roles of Community Member are made to any of the vacancies on CHG.**

#### **OS.80 Feedback from Cabinet**

**Agreed: The content of the Cabinet decision list following consideration of the recommendations from its meeting on 7 February 2017.**

#### **OS.81 Work Programme**

The Committee considered the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year. Members were reminded to submit any suggestions for future scrutiny items to the Chairman.

**Agreed: The work programme be noted.**

#### **OS.82 Press Involvement**

There were no future items for scrutiny that might require publicity.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 8.10pm.