

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY,
KIDDERMINSTER

26TH JULY 2017 (6PM)

Present:

Councillors: D Little (Chairman), J Aston, J Baker, R Bishop, S J Chambers, J R Desmond, N J Desmond, H E Dyke, P Dyke, N Gale, I Hardiman, J A Hart, M J Hart, K Henderson, V Higgs, A T Hingley, N Knowles, N Martin, S Miah, F M Oborski MBE, T L Onslow, C Rogers, J A Shaw, J D Smith, R J Vale, S J Walker, H S Williams, S J Williams and R Wilson.

C.23 Prayers

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

C.24 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors:
J-P Campion (Vice-Chairman), S J M Clee, M Rayner and G C Yarranton.

C.25 Declarations of Interests by Members

There were no declarations of interest.

C.26 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 10th May 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

C.27 Public Participation

There was no public participation.

C.28 Questions

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

Question from Councillor S Miah to the Cabinet Member for Housing,

Health and Well-being

In light of the tragic fire in Kensington could the Cabinet Member please tell me what steps are being taken to ensure that the high rise blocks in Kidderminster are as safe as they can possibly be?

What steps are being taken to reassure residents of those flats?

What steps are being taken to liaise with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority to ensure that any requirements or recommendations from the FRA are carried out?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Well-being

It is important to note that none of the high rise blocks in Kidderminster has cladding similar to that in the Grenfell Tower disaster. The Wyre Forest Community Housing blocks at Horsefair have brick and insulation exterior that was added in the 1980s.

The privately owned properties in Hoobrook are owned by a company named SM Properties. Some of the properties have been sold to leaseholders and some are rented out privately.

Wyre Forest Community Housing have shared with us information requested by ourselves and by the Department for Communities and Local Government on the nature of construction and we are aware they have sent the insulation material away for testing. We await the results of this. In addition they have been inspected by the Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service.

Residents of the Wyre Forest Community Housing properties have been visited by Wyre Forest Community Housing staff and the Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service officers and an emergency planning exercise was undertaken.

Residents of the privately owned Hoobrook flats will be visited by the Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service. The Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service will conduct an emergency planning exercise on these blocks on 10th August.

We have been in liaison with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service since the fire and are awaiting further information from them so we can determine whether further action is required in relation to the privately owned properties. Officers from the Council visited the blocks and met with the owners and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service on 18th July. We are now waiting on a copy of the Fire Safety Audit from Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service.

Supplementary question from Councillor S Miah to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Well-being

The residents who had previously raised issues about problems with Grenfell Tower felt their voices were never heard and they were not being listened to.

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What mechanisms will the Council put in place to make sure that this does not happen at Wyre Forest?

Supplementary answer from the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Well-being

I hope I have reassured you from the answer to the previous question that steps have been taken to ensure that residents are happy with the measures that have been taken. I am aware that following the exercise that was undertaken in the high rise buildings in the Horsefair, all the residents were complimentary of the Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service and were reassured. We await the further information on the buildings at Hoobrook.

Question from Councillor F Oborski MBE to the Leader of the Council

Could the Leader please tell me what expectation he has in terms of work/time commitment for Cabinet Members in Wyre Forest i.e. How many hours/days a week does he commit to as Leader and how much time do Cabinet Members commit?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

I have full confidence in the Cabinet Team that I lead and they all put in a substantial amount of time to ensure that they do their roles effectively. Obviously the role of being a Cabinet Member is exceptionally flexible and no two weeks in politics are identical. Work load and meeting commitments vary from week to week, but I have absolutely no hesitation in saying to this chamber that they all diligently put in the time that is required. If you look over the last 12 months or so, certain Members have left the Cabinet because of the demands of full time employment and that shows the weight of the role.

I always find it very difficult to talk about myself and how much time I commit; at times it feels like a seven day a week job. I can assure you there aren't many weeks that go by where I am not doing some work as Leader of this Council literally seven days a week.

Supplementary question from Councillor F Oborski MBE to the Leader of the Council

Every job that I have ever had in my entire working life was in the public sector, and every job that I have ever applied for had a job description and an announced time commitment. This is public money that is being spent on all our Councillors' allowances, wouldn't you agree with me that the public as our employers have a right to know how many hours a week each of us puts in?

Supplementary answer from the Leader of the Council

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What I would agree with you on is that we are indeed elected members but I don't necessarily agree with the premise of your supplementary. I would like to think we put trust and faith in the very people who elect us because ultimately we are all answerable through the ballot box. My electors as indeed yours and everybody else in this chamber will tell us if we do a good job or not and they will do that regularly through the ballot box. It is fair to say that all of those here have the trust and confidence of those that elect them. The role of Leader is appointed by this Council, and if it does not have trust and faith in its Council Leader then no doubt this Council will tell the Leader.

Question from Councillor F Oborski MBE to the Leader of the Council

Could the Leader please tell me what progress has been made in getting a bus service diverted to serve the Leisure Centre?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

We were cautiously optimistic when we relocated our brand new leisure centre on the Silverwoods site that Diamond bus would see a commercial opportunity in providing a service, not only to the leisure centre but of all the residential properties on there. We didn't actually promise that there would be a bus route, and we were very clear that we wanted to do all that we could to encourage a commercial bus route. Regrettably, as it presently stands Diamond do not want to divert along Silverwoods Way. I am unhappy about that and in my role as Leader I have a meeting with the Cabinet Member for Highways and the Transportation Manager at the County Council this Friday and I promise to report back to Council.

C.29 Chairman's Communications

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

C.30 Leader's Announcements and Report

The Leader of the Council referred Members to his tabled report.

C.31 Motions Submitted Under Standing Orders

There were no motions.

C.32 Urgent Motions submitted under Standing Orders

There were no urgent motions.

C.33 Review of the May 2017 Elections and the June 2017 UK Parliamentary Election

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented a report from the Acting

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Returning Officer for the UK Parliamentary election, Returning Officer for the District and Parish by-elections, Deputy Returning Officer for the County elections and Counting Officer for the Neighbourhood Plan Referendum, on the local elections held on 4th May 2017 and the UK Parliamentary election held on 8th June 2017.

He moved the recommendations as set out in the report, which would authorise the Chief Executive to proceed with consultation proposals to review the polling places for Mitton ward. The Leader of the Council seconded the proposal.

Councillor Oborski thanked the Returning Officer and his staff for what she thought were extremely efficiently run and well conducted elections and particularly the count for the Parliamentary Election, which in her opinion was one of the best which had been undertaken in Wyre Forest.

Councillor Knowles expressed concern over the low turnout figures and felt there was a need for action to encourage more people to vote.

Decision:

- 1. The report on the Local elections in May 2017 and the UK Parliamentary election in June 2017 be noted.**
- 2. DELEGATED authority be given to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources, to publish consultation proposals for a Polling Places review for Mitton ward to seek an alternative to St Wulstan's Community Centre, Stourport.**

C.34 Policy And Budget Framework – Matters which require a decision by Council

Recommendations from the Cabinet, 14th June 2017

- Churchill and Blakedown Neighbourhood Plan – Referendum**

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration presented the recommendations which sought approval for the Churchill and Blakedown Neighbourhood Plan to form part of the Development Plan for Wyre Forest District Council. He advised that the results of the referendum held on Thursday 4th May 2017 concluded that four hundred and fifty five people (87.8%) voted in favour of the plan, which would allow the local community to have more control over the way their parish is developed.

The Leader of the Council said that 40% of the electorate had taken part in the referendum and he was happy to second the proposal.

Decision: The Churchill and Blakedown Neighbourhood Plan forms

C.35 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Decision: Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business, on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of “exempt Information” as defined in paragraphs 8 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Councillor V Higgs left the meeting at this point, (6.30pm).

C.36 Capital Programme – Recommendations from Cabinet

- **14th June 2017 – Bewdley Medial Centre and Former Library Redevelopment**

Decision: The item be deferred to the September meeting of Council.

- **11th July 2017 – Outline Business Case for Investment in Residential Units**

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration presented the recommendations which sought approval for a proposal for the Council to purchase four two bedroom flats for private rent. He advised that the Council recognised there was a strong demand for good quality private rented housing within Wyre Forest to meet the rising housing need.

Councillor Knowles announced that there was full support for the proposal from the Labour Group.

Decision: The Capital Programme be amended to include the potential purchase of the units funded as set out in the exempt Cabinet report, with a reservation that expenditure is subject to the final business case and subsequent delegated decision whether or not to proceed.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 6.36pm.