

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER

THURSDAY, 2ND NOVEMBER 2017 (6PM)

Present:

Councillors: H E Dyke (Chairman), M Rayner (Vice-Chairman), J Baker, P Dyke, K Henderson, D Little, T L Onslow, S J Walker, S J Williams and R Wilson.

Observers

Councillors: M J Hart, S Miah and F M Oborski MBE.

OS.51 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: J R Desmond and H S Williams. Councillor S J Walker would be arriving late.

OS.52 Appointment of Substitutes

Councillor J Baker was appointed as a substitute for Councillor J R Desmond. Councillor T L Onslow was appointed as a substitute for Councillor H S Williams.

OS.53 Declarations of Interests by Members

No declarations of interest were made.

OS.54 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 5th October 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Councillor T L Onslow entered the meeting at this point, (6.03pm).

OS.55 Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy Mid-year Review Report 2017-18

The Committee received a report from the Corporate Director: Resources which provided Members with a mid-year review of the Council's treasury management policies, practices and activities in accordance with the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice.

The Corporate Director: Resources led Members through the report and advised that this was the second of 3 statutory reports which would be presented to the Committee in the current municipal year.

Councillor M J Hart left the meeting at 6.15pm and returned at 6.17pm.

The Corporate Director: Resources was pleased to advise that there were no issues to report and all the treasury management activities adhered to the Council's low risk investment strategy.

The Chairman of the Treasury Management Review Panel, Councillor F M Oborski MBE, advised that the report had been fully scrutinised by the Panel at its meeting on 30th October, and asked the Committee to support the recommendations. She thanked the Corporate Director: Resources and her team for the superb job they do in maintaining the treasury management service. She urged all Members to attend the next Treasury Management Training Session, which is scheduled to take place on 17th January 2018 and is carried out by the Council's Treasury Management Advisors, Capita.

Agreed: Recommend to Council:

To approve the Treasury Management Mid-year Review and updated Prudential Indicators.

OS.56 Local Plan Project Timetable

The Committee received a report from the Head of Strategic Growth which provided an update on the progress made in undertaking the Local Plan Review and set out a new project timetable.

The Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity and Place presented the report and advised that Council's were required to publish up to date information on their progress in preparing their Local Plans against the Local Development Scheme (LDS). He added that Wyre Forest District Council's LDS was last reviewed in November 2016 and outlined the key areas of progress which had been made since that time. He explained that there had been a very welcome high level of public engagement in the Preferred Options consultation which had resulted in a large number of responses all of which had to be considered and responded to in line with the Statement of Community Involvement.

The Chairman of the Local Plans Review Panel, Councillor F M Oborski MBE, advised that the report had been discussed in detail by the Panel at its meeting on 31st October and asked the Committee to support the recommendations.

Members were encouraged by the level of public engagement in the process, and in line with the recommendations from the Local Plan Review Panel meeting on 31st October 2017 the Committee agreed that in order to encourage the same level of public engagement alternative methods of publicising the consultation should be explored. It was suggested that the Pre-submission Plan Public Consultation be for an 8 week period, commencing as soon as possible following Cabinet approval.

Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet:

- **The Local Plan Project Timetable, as set out at Appendix 1 of the report, be approved.**

- **The Pre-submission Plan Public Consultation be for an 8 week period to ensure adequate time for engagement, commencing as soon as possible following Cabinet approval in June 2018.**

OS.57 Planning for the Right Homes in the Right Places – Consultation Response

The Committee received a report from the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity and Place which set out the draft responses to the consultation – Planning for the Right Homes in the Right Places, which was launched by the Department for Communities & Local Government on 14th September 2017.

Members were advised that, as there was no Cabinet meeting scheduled to take place before the consultation response deadline, the Council's formal response would be finalised by way of a Strong Leader report and any recommendations from the Committee would be considered as part of that process.

Councillor S J Walker entered the meeting at this point, (6.45pm).

The Committee considered each of the draft responses to the questions in turn and a few minor wording changes were suggested for inclusion in the final response.

Agreed: The minor wording changes to the draft responses be incorporated in the Council's formal responses to the consultation.

OS.58 Review of Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy (JMWMS) for Herefordshire and Worcestershire 2004 – 2034

The Committee received a report from the Operational Services Manager which outlined the amendments to the existing Strategy which were needed to ensure it remained relevant and fit for purpose.

The Operational Services Manager led Members through the report. He explained that the JMWMS was first published in 2004 and was a joint strategy which reflected the partnership across the six Worcestershire District Councils, Worcestershire County Council (WCC) and Herefordshire Council in relation to a shared waste disposal service.

He added that in 2014 the Herefordshire Council and WCC had agreed a variation to the waste disposal service with the contractor, Mercia Waste Management, to design, build and operate a 200,000 tonne per annum Energy from Waste facility. The facility became fully operational in March 2017 and currently produces enough electricity to power 32,000 homes.

The Committee supported the revision which reflected the changes in national policy, local provision and projections for future demand that had occurred since the current strategy was adopted. Members welcomed the news of the collective agreement from partners that a 90% diversion from landfill target was feasible for 2030.

Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet:

The Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy (JMWMS) for Herefordshire and Worcestershire 2004 – 2034, be approved.

Councillor P Dyke left the meeting at this point, (7.28pm).

OS.59 Work Programme

The Committee considered the work programme for the current municipal year.

Agreed: The work programme be noted.

OS.60 Press Involvement

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

OS.61 Depot 2020 Masterplan – Improve and Invest

The Committee received a report from the Corporate Director: Community Well-being and Environment which invited Members to consider proposals for further investment in the site of the Council's operational depot at Green Street, Kidderminster with the objective of improving and investing in the asset to increase functionality and sustainability.

The Corporate Director: Community Well-being and Environment led Members through the report and outlined the three proposals for the site all of which included the relocation of the Council's customer services centre from the town hall to Green Street. She explained the rationale for the relocation of the customer services centre. Members were advised that the transformation of services had led to a 50% reduction in visitor numbers in the last 5 years, and a 32% reduction in call volumes, a trend which was continuing. She added that the Council was continuing to transform its services, providing a digital service for the low complexity / high volume transactions such as reporting issues, making payments, applications and accessing information. The shift to accessing services online would free up Officer time for the more complex cases where face to face customer service was needed.

The Corporate Director: Community Well-being and Environment said that the relocation of the customer services centre would see a reduced and more energy efficient footprint for the service. She added that the relocation of the revenues and benefits staff from Wyre Forest House (WFH), whose purpose is "to help me with my financial situation", would bring the entire team together and enable them to give the best possible service to customers with more complex needs. The relocation of the revenues and benefits staff would also free up space at WFH which could be used to generate rental income.

Members were advised that, overall, the proposals provided a worthwhile positive financial contribution to the Council, which was estimated at £42,000 in a full year.

The Committee discussed the proposals and there was support for the upgrading of welfare and resource areas for staff.

Several Members raised concerns about the relocation of the customer services

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centre from the town centre. The current location was accessible by public transport; all buses coming into Kidderminster stopped by the town hall. There was no direct bus to the Green Street site, the nearest bus stops were by the Carpet Museum at the top end of Green Street or on New Road, which is opposite the depot. However it was said that buses travelling along that road only went in one direction.

A Member recalled that, when the decision was made to close the satellite hub offices in Stourport and Bewdley, part of the reasoning was that there was a hub in Kidderminster town centre. She added that there was still a large number of people who could not access services online and moving the hub would make it less accessible for users. It was acknowledged that the proposals made provision for car parking for visitors and disabled people at the site. It was raised that many people with mobility issues were not registered as disabled or had no access to a car and would find it difficult to walk to the Green Street site.

Some Members felt that, before a final decision on the relocation of the hub was made, further consideration should be given as it was only fair to the 41,474 visitors who used the hub last year.

The Leader of Council addressed the Committee. He advised that the Cabinet had spent a lot of time considering the masterplan options for the Green Street site which was in need of improvement and currently under utilised.

He acknowledged that the Green Street site was not best served by public transport. However there were bus stops near to the location and some visitor car parking spaces would be provided. He added that the Council had a £1.9m funding gap to fill over the next 3 years and the proposals provided an estimated revenue saving of £42,000 a year. In relation to the relocation of the hub from the town hall, he said that in the past the suggestion of renting a vacant shop in the town centre had been explored. However this had been ruled out as it would still result in a financial cost to the Council.

A Member proposed Option B for the recommendation to Cabinet. He welcomed the potential of the improved aspect on Green Street by bringing back into use two locally listed buildings. The proposal was seconded and upon a show of hands the majority vote was carried.

Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet:

Option B be taken forward for investing in and improving the Green Street site.

OS.62

Exempt Information

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 2, 6 and 7 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

OS.63 Depot 2020 Masterplan – Improve and Invest Appendix 2 – Financial Appraisal

Following the earlier resolution of the Committee, the Leader of the Council led Members through the financial appraisal for Option B.

The Corporate Director: Community Well-being and Environment assured Members that the appraisal included a sensitivity analysis of the occupancy levels of the units and the project would still be financially viable even if there was a 20% void in occupancy.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 8.03pm.