

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER

THURSDAY, 5TH JULY 2018 (6PM)

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**Present:**

Councillors: H E Dyke (Chairman), P Harrison, N Harris, K Henderson, N Knowles, D Little, S Miah, H S Williams and S J Williams.

**Observers**

Councillors: N J Desmond, M J Hart, F M Oborski MBE, T L Onslow, C Rogers and J A Shaw.

**OS.11 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: M Rayner (Vice-Chairman) and S J Walker.

**OS.12 Appointment of Substitutes**

Councillor P Harrison was appointed as a substitute for Councillor S J Walker.

**OS.13 Declarations of Interests by Members**

Councillor N Harris declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI) in agenda item 9 – South Kidderminster Enterprise Park: Revised Local Development Order, August 2018, and would leave the room whilst the item was considered.

**OS.14 Minutes**

**Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 7th June 2018 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

**OS.15 The Environmental Offences (Fixed Penalties) (England) Regulations 2017**

The Committee received a report from the Corporate Director: Community Well-being and Environment which detailed the revised Government arrangements that had been made within the Environmental Offences (Fixed Penalties) (England) Regulations 2017. In line with the changes Members were asked to consider formally reviewing and adjusting the fixed penalty charging regime that was currently adopted and in place for Wyre Forest District Council.

The Senior Community and Environmental Protection Officer presented the report and tabled a list which detailed the number of fixed penalty notices which had been issued during 2017/18.

#### **Agenda Item No. 4**

Councillor D Little entered the meeting at this point, (6.08pm).

The Committee supported the proposal and agreed that in line with the revised Government arrangements it would be timely to review the Council's Environmental Education and Enforcement Strategy 2007. The Chairman said this could be included in the review of civil enforcement issues which was on the work programme for the latter part of the year.

**Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet that:**

**The results of a review that suggests amendments to the penalty charging regime as outlined below. This will provide the Council with a more effective enforcement regime in the fight against environmental crime and anti social behaviour.**

- **To establish a revised set of maximum penalty charges that will apply to relevant environmental offences within the District and being set within government parameters, as set out in the "proposed new penalty" column in the Appendix of the report.**
- **To establish a revised set of discounted penalty charges that will apply (pending early payment) to relevant environmental offences within the District and being set within government parameters, as set out in the "proposed new discounted penalty" column in the Appendix of the report.**

#### **OS.16**

#### **Affordable Housing Review Panel – Conclusions and Recommendations**

The Committee received a report from the Head of Strategic Growth and the Housing Enabling Consultant which presented the recommendations from the Affordable Housing Review Panel. The Review Panel was established in response to Members concerns regarding the acute shortage of suitable social and affordable rented accommodation within the District.

The Enabling Consultant led Members through the report and outlined the key topics which were considered by the Panel.

The Chairman of the Review Panel, Councillor N Knowles, thanked the Members of the Panel and the Officers for their hard work and asked the Committee to support the recommendations.

Councillor N Desmond entered the meeting at this point, (6.38pm).

The Committee discussed the findings of the review and acknowledged the challenges surrounding the overall availability of affordable housing in the current stock, and the issues affecting supply, waiting lists and allocations. In relation to the role of shared ownership in the local housing market, Members agreed that it was important that the full details of how the scheme operates was made clear to people from the outset.

**Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet:**

- 1. To continue to value the close working relationship with The Community**

#### **Agenda Item No. 4**

**Housing Group and Oakleaf Commercial Services as there are shared aims and visions and the opportunity to explore future joint ventures.**

- 2. To accept the offer of help from the Government appointed Help to Buy Agent Orbit to support future activities and events to raise awareness about shared ownership as a product and its availability in the district.**
- 3. That Cabinet gives serious consideration to the Councils role as a landowner and the use of Council owned sites for the delivery of Social Rent and Affordable Housing.**
- 4. That the affordable housing planning policy makes provision to cover sites that deliver in excess of the Local Plan threshold for affordable housing (currently 30%).**
- 5. As part of the Local Plan Review, officers in conjunction with the Viability Consultant continue to explore the potential of applying different affordable housing thresholds to different types of sites.**
- 6. Officers investigate the possibility of ensuring the full details of how the shared ownership scheme operates is made clear to people from the outset.**

#### **OS.17 Domestic Abuse Pledge “Make a Stand”**

The Committee received a report from the Head of Strategic Growth which raised awareness of the national domestic abuse pledge being supported by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), Women’s Aid and Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA).

Councillor M Hart left the meeting at 6.57pm and returned at 6.58pm.  
Councillor T Onslow left the meeting at 6.58pm.

The Head of Strategic Growth presented the report and outlined the four commitments of the pledge. Members were advised that the pledge was launched at the end of May 2018 and had already been signed up to by 100+ organisations. She added that the topic had been raised at the Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership to encourage all Councils and Registered Providers in Worcestershire to commit to the pledge.

She explained that organisations had until September 2019 to put the commitments in place and was pleased to report that Wyre Forest District Council was advanced in its preparations to meet the commitments.

A discussion ensued and there was unanimous agreement by Members for recommending to Cabinet that the authority supports the campaign by signing the pledge and appointing a pledge champion.

**Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet that they DECIDE to:**

- 1.1 Sign up to the “Make a Stand” Domestic Abuse Pledge.**

**1.2 Appoint the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Wellbeing as the pledge champion.**

**OS.18 Lion Fields Future Phases Development**

The Committee considered a report from the Head of Economic Development and Regeneration – North Worcestershire, which set out the next steps for the Council in bringing forward re-development proposals for ‘Parcel 4’ of Lion Fields, which covers the redevelopment of the Bromsgrove Street Car Park.

The Economic Development and Regeneration Manager led Members through the report in detail. The Committee acknowledged the importance of the site and discussed the need for providing improved access between the site and the remainder of the Town Centre.

Members supported the proposal which would provide the Council with a clearer understanding of the redevelopment options available.

**Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet that:**

**Further work is commissioned as detailed in the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

Councillor N Harris left the meeting at this point, (7.37pm).

**OS.19 South Kidderminster Enterprise Park: Revised Local Development Order, August 2018**

The Committee considered a report from the Economic Development and Regeneration Manager which presented the results of the public consultation on the revised Local Development Order (LDO) for the South Kidderminster Enterprise Park.

Councillor N Desmond left the meeting at 7.39pm and returned at 7.41pm.

Members welcomed the proposal to renew the Order. It was agreed that the pro-active approach to helping businesses develop had been well received and had provided circa £25m of economic investment since its initial adoption in 2012.

**Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet that:**

**The Local Development Order, as attached at Appendix 1 of the report, be adopted for a further 3 years.**

Councillor N Harris returned to the meeting at this point, (7.42pm).

**OS.20 Council Tax Reduction Scheme Review 2019/20**

The Committee considered a report from the Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Manager which provided information of the work undertaken by the revenues, benefits and customer services section on the redesign of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for implementation by 1st April 2019.

## Agenda Item No. 4

The Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Manager led Members in detail through the report. She explained that the proposed new scheme would comply with the original principles of the scheme that was set up in 2013. The principles being; Every household with working age claimants should pay something; The scheme should incentivise people into work; People with greater amounts of savings receive less support; Protection would be provided through a Hardship Fund to those who are least able to pay; and the scheme would be in support of the Council's Corporate Plan Priorities of an increased supply of good quality and decent homes in which people can afford to live. She added that it was proposed that the current means tested scheme was replaced by a simple income grid model.

A lengthy discussion ensued. In response to a Member question the Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Manager confirmed that the hardship fund had been utilised during 2017/18, the exact amount would be circulated to the Committee for information.

Members supported the proposals and looked forward to receiving the results of the consultation at a future meeting of the Committee.

**Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet:**

**To support the proposals to undertake a consultation with Major Preceptors and the public on proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme from 1st April 2019.**

Councillor N Desmond left the meeting at this point, (8.04pm).

### **OS.21 Acquisition of Land in Market Street, Kidderminster**

The Committee received a report from Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity and Place which set out a proposal for the Council to acquire a vacant parcel of land at Market Street in Kidderminster.

The Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity and Place led Members through the report. He explained that, if necessary the Council could use its compulsory purchase powers to enable the bringing forward of a redevelopment of a vacant eyesore site at a prominent gateway position within Kidderminster town centre, should the current owner of the land fail to bring the site forward for redevelopment within a reasonable time period.

Councillor M Hart left the meeting at this point, (8.14pm).

Members fully supported the proposal and agreed that the compulsory purchase powers were a useful tool for the Council to have in bringing the site forward for redevelopment.

**Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet that:**

**The Council makes a Compulsory Purchase Order ('CPO') to acquire 'The Order' land as detailed if the owner does not advance redevelopment of the site in a timely manner.**

**OS.22 Treasury Management Review Panel**

The Chairman advised that the Treasury Management Review Panel would be formed again for the current municipal year. The first meeting of the Panel and training session for all Members was scheduled to take place on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2018.

**Agreed: Members to notify the Principal Committee and Member Services Officer if they would like to sit on the Panel for the current municipal year.**

**OS.23 Feedback from Cabinet**

**Agreed: The content of the Cabinet decision list following consideration of the recommendations from its meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2018 be noted.**

**OS.24 Work Programme**

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

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

**OS.25 Press Involvement**

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

**OS.26 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.27 Industrial Unit Investment Business Case**

The Committee considered a confidential report which sought approval for an industrial unit investment business case using the Council’s Capital Portfolio Fund.

The Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity and Place led Members through the report. He provided the background to the investment opportunity, including its location, condition and valuation. He explained the justification for the investment in the context of the Government’s recently published Statutory Guidance for Local Authority Investments which was set out in detail in the report.

An in depth discussion ensued and Members welcomed the investment within the Wyre Forest District.

**Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet that:**

**The Council invests in the industrial unit from its Capital Portfolio Fund.**

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 8.59pm.