

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY,
KIDDERMINSTER

27TH FEBRUARY 2019 (6PM)

Present:

Councillors: S J Williams (Chairman), K Henderson (Vice-Chairman), J Aston, J Baker, J-P Campion, S J Chambers, M Cheeseman, A Coleman, N J Desmond, H E Dyke, P Dyke, N Gale, I Hardiman, N Harris, P Harrison, J A Hart, M J Hart, V Higgs, N Knowles, D Little, N Martin, S Miah, F M Oborski MBE, T L Onslow, M Rayner, C Rogers, J D Smith, A Totty, R J Vale, S J Walker, G Webster and H S Williams.

C.62 Prayers

Prayers were said by Father Tim Williams, Team Rector for Kidderminster West Team.

C.63 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

C.64 Declarations of Interests by Members

Councillor J-P Campion declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI) in Agenda Item 13 – Council Tax 2019-20, as he was the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia and as he was the sovereign body of the organisation he would leave the room whilst the agenda item was discussed.

Councillor T L Onslow declared a DPI in Agenda Item 13 – Council Tax 2019-20, as she was the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia and she would leave the room whilst the agenda item was discussed.

C.65 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 12th December 2018 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

C.66 Public Participation

There was no public participation.

C.67 Questions

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

1. Question from Councillor N Knowles to the Cabinet Member for Resources

At a recent meeting, the Cabinet Member for Resources responded to a question of mine asking if the Conservative Administration would invest some of the £25m loan into the developments at Bromsgrove Street and Churchfields, and he said no.

Why won't the Conservative Administration of Wyre Forest District Council invest in these two sites to provide social housing and help solve the housing waiting list of 4000 families. Will the Administration change its apparent policy and invest in these sites?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Resources

It is a very noble ambition to have more social housing in the district and obviously if it was easy we would do it. Like Councillor Knowles we want to see more social housing and to tackle the housing problem; unfortunately it is not that simple for a number of different factors. First and foremost as Councillor Knowles will know, we as an authority sold our social housing back in 2000 under a Labour administration and obviously we have not been a social landlord since then. This means that we are not registered to provide for social housing and more importantly we cannot access the grants in order to make these projects viable.

As set out in our Capital Strategy we have to borrow 100% for these projects to be viable. For social housing projects you need circa 50% grant and 50% borrowing; unfortunately we do not have the grant and we have to borrow 100%. So the two key factors are that we are not a registered landlord and will never be, and secondly we do not have access to those key funds which makes it exceptionally difficult for us to venture into the realms of social housing. However that is not to say that at some point we might not want to venture back into the housing game; and we have said that as an administration quite clearly. We have set up the local authority trading company which will be a vehicle to potentially make that happen. Obviously we have to borrow 100% of the money so we could put our land into the mix and partner with a developer to build houses, but that is a whole world away from actually becoming a registered social landlord and providing social housing. As an administration we are absolutely focused on seeing the two areas you alluded to - Bromsgrove Street and Churchfields - redeveloped and bringing them back into use.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Knowles

Why wouldn't we get registered then we might be eligible for grants as a landlord? Incidentally I voted against getting rid of the stock of our council

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housing in 2000. The local authority trading company could build on our land but when the Cabinet Member says we are a whole world away from doing this I think it is right. It is all about determination and will. Won't the Conservative administration exercise the will to actually become registered as a social landlord and build social houses and reduce the horrific housing waiting list?

Supplementary Answer from the Cabinet Member for Resources

Let me make it absolutely clear we have no desire as an administration or a Council to ever be a registered social landlord. I think the Council made the right decision back in 1999 / 2000 to sell off the plethora of social housing. Many Councils up and down the land have transferred their stock to the private sector. I think the private sector and registered landlords are obviously the right people to develop social housing. I think it is better for us to focus on other areas rather than going back 20 years to an area we have left behind.

2. Question from Councillor F M Oborski MBE to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Well-being

In view of recent statements on Social Media from the Chairman of Kidderminster Harriers about his proposed move of the Stadium to Stourport Road, could the Cabinet Member tell me:

1. What discussions have been held or are planned to be held with Harriers Chairman about these proposals?
2. What details have Harriers sent as a response to the Local Plan Consultation?
3. When will these proposals be shared with the Local Plans Review Panel?

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

The Cabinet Member read out an extract from the transcript from social media of the interview with Mr Colin Gordon, the Chairman of Kidderminster Harriers who was asked how the plans for the stadium were progressing.

The administration is always open to listening to what our key community stakeholders might want to share in terms of their future plans and in that regard our principal football club is no different. Over the past few years the Chairman of Kidderminster Harriers and his team have shared their vision with the administration and Senior Officers. Any such meetings involving Cabinet Members have always been set against a backdrop of no decisions being made at these meetings; that is to ensure that no Councillor who may have a role to play on another day at a Committee meeting in terms of discharging the Council's formal decision making responsibilities is prejudiced from doing so by having determined any matter under consideration. The Council received over 1000 responses from over 500 respondents to the Local Plan Consultation on the pre-submission version of the Plan and Kidderminster Harriers Football Club was amongst those who responded. Officers are currently processing those responses and you, as current Chairman of the Local Plans review panel, will be amongst the first to

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see those responses when Officers have undertaken all of their work in considering and preparing suggested responses.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Oborski MBE

Thank you for reading out such a long amount of text from Mr Gordon's social media quote, but you still have not answered the first question. It is in the media quote Mr Gordon specifically says that in the next few weeks he would be meeting the Cabinet to discuss his proposals. What I am asking is has any such meeting being agreed with the Harriers Chairman, yes or no?

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

The answer is no.

3. Question from Councillor F M Oborski MBE to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Well-being

What steps can Councillors take to reassure members of the public who are adamant that they did not receive copies of the Council leaflet advertising the Local Plans Drop In Sessions that their views can still be heard?

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

As Members will recall the consultation on the pre-submission version of the Local Plan under regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning regulations of 2012, ran from 1st November to 17th December last year. The public's awareness was raised through a wide variety of methods including social media posts, a press release and several articles in the Shuttle. I am pleased to report that hundreds of local people took part and over 500 written respondents make a total of around 1000 comments. Officers continue to work through the detail of the points raised by respondents and a summary of the consultation will be shared with the Local Plans Review Panel in due course. In addition to their ability to give their views directly through the consultation before Christmas, and the previous consultation in 2017 on the preferred options, members of the public could make their views known to elected Members. There are still further stages for the Council to consider the plan before it is submitted. This will include consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and Full Council before the plan is submitted to the Secretary of State for examination by an Inspector. In addition, those who have registered an interest to do so may be called to give evidence by the Inspector.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Oborski MBE

Thousands of local residents do not use social media and the Shuttle no longer reaches the majority of properties in the district. In view of the failure of the Council's publicity leaflet being delivered to every property in the district; thus meaning thousands of people did not know the Local Plan consultation

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was going on or did not know that land near their homes was possibly going to be developed, will the Cabinet re-open the public consultation and the pre-submission plan, yes or no?

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

Local people have had ample opportunity to take part in the consultation whether or not they received a leaflet. Hundreds of them have provided written responses and we now need to focus on the next steps in considering these comments and ensuring that the Local Plan can be adopted in a timely fashion.

C.68 Chairman's Communications

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

The Chairman announced that he will be holding his Chairman's Charity Dinner on Friday 29th March 2019 at Rowberry's Nursery. The tickets are £25.00 each and all proceeds will go to the Kidderminster Hospital League of Friends.

C.69 Leader's Announcements and Report

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

Upon a special request to the Chairman, Councillor F M Oborski MBE paid tribute to Councillors J Baker, J –P Campion, N Harris and S Williams who would be standing down at the May 2019 elections.

C.70 Motions Submitted under Standing Orders

No motions had been received in accordance with Standing Orders (Section 7, 4.1).

C.71 Urgent Motions submitted under Standing Orders

There were no urgent motions.

C.72 Policy And Budget Framework – Matters which require a decision by Council

- a. **Recommendation from the Licensing and Environmental Committee, 4th February 2019**
 - **Review of Fees and Charges for the Council's Licensing and Regulatory Services Function 2019/20**

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The Chairman of the Licensing and Environmental Committee, Councillor J Baker moved the recommendations for approval, which was seconded by the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Protection.

Decision: The proposals for fees and charges within the Council's Licensing, Food, Health, Safety and Pollution Control functions for 2019/20, as detailed in the report, be included in the Council's 2019/20 budget strategy.

b. Recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 7th February 2019

• Treasury Management Strategy 2019-20

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor H Dyke moved the recommendations for approval. The Chairman of the Treasury Management Review Panel, Councillor Oborski MBE seconded the proposal and thanked the Corporate Director: Resources and her team for the excellent way in which they manage the Council's treasury management function.

Decision:

- 1. The restated Prudential Indicators and Limits for the financial years 2019-20 to 2021-22 included in Appendix 3 of the report, be approved.**
- 2. The updated Treasury Management and Investment Policy and Strategy Statements for the period 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020 (the associated Prudential Indicators are included in Appendix 3 of the report and the detailed criteria is included in Section 10 and Appendix 5) be approved.**
- 3. The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement that sets out the Council's policy on MRP included in Appendix 1 of the report, be approved.**
- 4. The Authorised Limit Prudential Indicator included in Appendix 3 of the report be approved.**
- 5. The separate, but intrinsically linked, Capital Strategy 2019-22 to be approved, which sets out the policy statement covering non-treasury investments including the related suite of prudential indicators.**

C.73

Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019-2022

A report was considered from the Corporate Director: Resources which sought approval of the Council's budget for 2019-2022 having considered the

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proposed decision and budget reports recommended to Council by Cabinet on 12th February 2019 including:

- Base Budget Projections 2019-22 including Cabinet Proposals
- Fees and Charges
- Capital Strategy 2019-22
- Increasing the Council Tax charge for long-term empty dwellings
- Report of the Chief Financial Officer in respect of Sections 25-28 Local Government Act 2003

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval.

He explained that this was the administration's 15th consecutive budget since taking control of the Council in 2004. He said that much had changed in those 15 years. Local authorities have experienced radical change due to reductions in funding and local Councils were a totally different entity now to what they were 15 years ago. He added that Wyre Forest was no different. The Council had to change and to adapt to the new financial landscape and it was a totally different organisation now, leaner and much more efficient.

The Cabinet Member for Resources said that the authority was about a quarter less in size in terms of staffing numbers but was doing far more with less. He said we are more focused with 2 key corporate priorities, with 3 Corporate Directors and a Chief Executive, spread over Wyre Forest House and the Green Street depot. He added that the tax payers of Wyre Forest were getting value for money. Instead of their money going to support a clunky, bureaucratic organisation, more of their money was going to support front line services.

He said it has been a difficult journey but it had been the right journey. He added the administration's principles and values 15 years ago are the same now, built on efficiency and value for money.

He explained that the budget was a continuation of those values and previous strategies, with a focus on a mixture of internal savings, transforming how services are delivered and by growing income. He said that thankfully the transformation over the last few years had moved us strongly in the direction of a budget where expenditure was matched by income.

The Cabinet Member for Resources said that the strategic trend to grow our income would continue. He said that the authority had a great track record in generating income in order to protect front line services. The Council had successfully grown its income from £3.9m to £5.7m, some 35% of the net revenue budget over the last 5 years. He said that the Cabinet proposal in the budget increased this figure by a further £325k.

He added that the budget was also a listening budget and again builds on the idea of trying to reach out and achieve consensus. He said that the administration had listened to the views of local residents and other political groups.

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He said growth from fees and charges would continue to contribute significantly. However by listening the Cabinet had already taken the decision to freeze all car parking charges across the District next year. He said this strategy will cost the authority £125k, so it would be impossible to carry on indefinitely but it is a fair compromise and one that will please shoppers and retailers.

The Cabinet Member for Resources said that they had also taken on board the Independent and Liberal Democrat Group's proposal for a new season ticket offer for Bromsgrove Street car park costing just £300 for 12 months. He added this was extremely competitive and would be a big help to those who work in the town and should also help to reduce on street parking in nearby areas, which would please those local residents affected by parking problems.

He added that they had also developed the Independent and Liberal Democrat Group's proposal for a Rough Sleepers Protocol in Wyre Forest which would provide emergency shelter for the homeless in severe weather conditions. He said currently this provision was only available in Worcester and Redditch. He said that it was proposed to invest £13.5k in each year over the Medium Term Financial Strategy; he added that the use and effectiveness of this would be monitored very closely.

He said the administration had listened closely to the views of local residents in relation to Council Tax. Last year 51% of residents supported a small rise in Council Tax to help protect local services and this year the figure has risen to 54%. Taking these views into account, coupled with the financial context, he said he believed the time was right modestly to increase Council Tax by £5 or 2.39%.

The Cabinet Member for Resources said that the budget was a positive and progressive budget that continued to benefit our communities and our residents. He said that a £30k revenue investment to maintain the standard of highway verges across the District in 2019/20 was proposed. He said that the authority maintained all 30 MPH grass verges on behalf of the County and they had reduced their contribution by £30k. Given the importance of Place and having a clean and tidy area, he felt it was important that the funds be reinstated for next year. He said that they were also investing to strengthen the Council's Environmental Protection and Enforcement team with a further full time officer, helping to tackle litter and fly tipping.

He said that it was planned to continue to provide Councillors with £1000 each for their Community Leadership Fund, to help them develop worthwhile community projects for the next financial year. He said that he believed the money was vital for small organisations and charities, not only to exist but for them to run and put on events in our communities that otherwise would not take place.

He added that the administration would continue its trend of promoting

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Localism by creating a new £50k Localism Fund for Parishes, Town Councils and community groups to carry out their good work who wished to carry out functions that contribute to the priorities of the Council.

In conclusion, he said the budget followed on naturally from previous budgets, one that shares the same principles and vision as the last 15 years. He said as a result of those hard, difficult choices, it meant that the Council was in a far better place now financially. He said that the administration had worked with other political groups to try and deliver a budget that works for all and more importantly delivers for the district's communities. He said that he truly believed the budget did that. He thanked the Chief Executive and the Corporate Leadership Team for their continued help and advice in producing a strategy that was bold, effective and continued to put the authority on a sound financial footing.

The Leader of the Council formally seconded the budget proposals. He said that he firmly believed that the budget strategy was both responsible and still delivered the services for the communities that the Council represents.

The Leader of the Independent and Liberal Democrat Group, Councillor Oborski MBE said she was delighted that the administration had adopted some of their budget amendments. She said she was grateful for the way in which the administration had sought to involve other groups in building a budget that was sustainable for the district.

Councillor N Knowles presented an amendment to the budget proposals on behalf of the Labour Party which sought approval to reduce the Community Leadership fund for 2019-20 to £16.5k, and to approve a policy statement which fits in with the Financial Strategy 2019-22 towards housing and employment. The proposal was seconded by Councillor V Higgs.

A lengthy debate ensued. Several Members spoke about the importance of retaining the Community Leadership fund at its current amount and how much good it does across the district. The Leader of the Council thanked the Labour Party for submitting their alternative budget proposals.

Named votes on the Labour Party proposals was recorded as follows and the amendment was defeated:

For (3)

Councillors: V Higgs, N Knowles and G Webster.

Against (27)

Councillors: J Aston, J Baker, J-P Champion, S J Chambers, M Cheeseman, A Coleman, N J Desmond, H E Dyke, P Dyke, N Gale, I Hardiman, N Harris, P Harrison, J A Hart, M J Hart, K Henderson, D Little, S Miah, F M Oborski MBE, T L Onslow, C Rogers, J D Smith,

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A Totty, R J Vale, S J Walker, H S Williams and S J Williams.

Abstained (2)

Councillors: N Martin and M Rayner

Councillor J-P Champion spoke about the transformation of the Council over the past 15 years and said he would be voting in favour of the administration's budget as he believed it continued that journey and was the best deal for the Council's residents.

A named vote on the substantive budget proposal was recorded as follows and was agreed:

For (28)

Councillors: J Aston, J Baker, J-P Champion, S J Chambers, M Cheeseman, A Coleman, N J Desmond, H E Dyke, P Dyke, N Gale, I Hardiman, N Harris, P Harrison, J A Hart, M J Hart, K Henderson, D Little, N Martin, S Miah, F M Oborski MBE, T L Onslow, C Rogers, J D Smith, A Totty, R J Vale, S J Walker, H S Williams and S J Williams.

Against (3)

Councillors: V Higgs, N Knowles and G Webster.

Abstained (1)

Councillor: M Rayner

Decision:

1.1 THREE YEAR BUDGET, CAPITAL STRATEGY AND POLICY FRAMEWORK 2019-22

1.1.1 Council APPROVED the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019-22;

1.1.2 APPROVED the revised Cabinet Proposals – taking into account the impact on the Council's Capital and Revenue Budgets for 2019-22 as shown in the table in paragraph 3.14 of the report to Council including:

a. Approval of the Community Leadership Fund for 2019-20 of £33k;

b. Approval of a further Localism Fund allocation of £50k in 2019-20;

- c. **Approval of the allocation of £30k in 2019-20 to preserve service standards of highways verge maintenance;**
 - d. **Approval of additional staffing resource for Planning Enforcement of 1 FTE for a 2 year fixed term at a cost of £25.9k in 2019-20 and £27.1k in 2020-21 funded from a combination of the 20% increase in Planning Fees previously approved and service efficiency savings as a result of the new system implementation;**
 - e. **Approval of additional staffing resource for Environmental Protection and Enforcement team of 1 FTE for a 2 year fixed term. Funded in part from additional fine income at a net cost of £17,540 in 2019-20, and £18,780 in 2020-21;**
 - f. **Approval of additional income generation targets of £75k in 2019-20, £100k in 2020-21 and £150k in 2021-22;**
 - g. **Approval of £13.5k in 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22 for a Rough Sleeper night shelter protocol to be funded from additional Flexible Homeless Support Grant from Central Government (see paragraph 3.13).**
- 1.1.3 APPROVED the fees and charges in line with this Strategy and in line with the recommendations of the Licensing and Environmental Committee of 4th February 2019, and the impact on the Council's Revenue Budget for 2019-22, as shown in Appendix 3;**
- 1.1.4 APPROVED the Council's updated Capital Strategy including:**
- a) **Approval of the Capital Strategy 2019-22 including the associated Quantitative Indicators in Appendix 2 of the December Cabinet report;**
 - b) **Approval of variations to the Capital Programme and Vehicle, Equipment and Systems Renewals Schedule as set out in Appendix 2 of the report (which updates Appendix 1, Appendices A and B of the Capital Strategy report to December 2018 Cabinet);**
 - c) **Approval of the limits for gross debt of non treasury**

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investments compared to net service expenditure and for commercial income as a percentage of net service expenditure as set out in Appendix 2 of the December report;

d) Approval of the limits for loan investments as set out in paragraph 5.1 of the 18th December 2018 report.

1.1.5 APPROVED that any Final Accounts savings arising from 2018-22 over and above the target allowed for in the Council's Financial Strategy, together with surplus Earmarked Reserves, be allocated by the Corporate Director: Resources in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources;

1.1.6 The General Fund Revenue Budget be APPROVED including all updates from the position in December 2018 as set out in the report.

1.2 COUNCIL TAX

1.2.1 Council SET the Council Tax for Wyre Forest District Council on a Band D Property at £214.34 for 2019-20 (£209.34 2018-19) which represents an increase of 2.39% on Council Tax from 2018-19.

1.2.2 ENDORSED the provisional Council Tax on a Band D Property in 2020-21 of £219.34 and £224.34 in 2021-22, being increases of 2.33 % and 2.28% respectively.

1.2.3 APPROVED increasing the Council Tax charge for long-term empty dwellings to the maximum possible level with effect from 1st April 2019 and in future years, in accordance with section 11B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended by section 2 of the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018 (see paragraph 5.3);

1.2.4 NOTED the opinion of the Corporate Director: Resources (as Chief Financial Officer) on the budget proposals, recommended by the Cabinet in this report, as detailed in Appendix 4 of the report.

Councillors J-P Champion and T L Onslow left the meeting at this point, (7.36pm).

C.74

Council Tax 2019-20

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Council considered the formal resolution for setting the Council Tax for 2019-20. The amount of Council Tax depends on the budget proposal recommendations from Cabinet to Council on 12th February 2019 which includes the precepts by Worcestershire County Council, The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia and Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority.

The Cabinet Member for Resources formally moved the recommendations for approval. The Leader of the Council seconded the proposals. He praised the Town and Parish Councils for their precepts. He said it would enable them to continue to provide fundamentally important local services on the ground, whether that was in an urban area or a parish. He added that the District Council looked forward to working with the Town and Parish Councils over the next municipal year to continue to provide those services.

A named vote on the Council Tax resolution was recorded as follows and was unanimously agreed:

For (30)

Councillors: J Aston, J Baker, S J Chambers, M Cheeseman, A Coleman, N J Desmond, H E Dyke, P Dyke, N Gale, I Hardiman, N Harris, P Harrison, J A Hart, M J Hart, K Henderson, V Higgs, N Knowles, D Little, N Martin, S Miah, F M Oborski MBE, M Rayner, C Rogers, J D Smith, A Totty, R J Vale, S J Walker, G Webster, H S Williams and S J Williams.

Decision: The formal Council Tax Resolution 2019-20 at Appendix 1 of the report, taking into account information contained in Appendices 2 to 5 be approved.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 7.41pm.