

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
CABINET**

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER
12TH NOVEMBER 2019 (6PM)**

Present:

Councillors: G W Ballinger (Chairman), F M Oborski MBE (Vice-Chairman),
H E Dyke, N Martin and J W R Thomas.

Observers:

Councillors: N J Desmond, I Hardiman, M J Hart and S Miah.

CAB.33 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

CAB.34 Declarations of Interests by Members

No declarations of interest were made.

CAB.35 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 18th September 2019 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CAB.36 Call Ins

No decisions had been called in since the last Cabinet meeting.

CAB.37 Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There were no items requiring urgent attention.

CAB.38 Public Participation

There was no public participation.

CAB.39 Write-off of Amounts Outstanding Report

A report was considered from the Corporate Director: Resources which enabled the Cabinet to give consideration to writing off the sum of £147,073.26 in respect of debts that cannot be collected.

The Leader of the Council presented the report and advised that, despite considerable efforts by the team, the authority has been unable to collect the amounts presented for write off. Three cases were in respect of Business

Rates and one for Council Tax debt.

The Leader explained that as billing authority the Council is responsible for the collection of Business Rates (National Non Domestic Rates or NNDR) c£30m per annum and Council Tax c£58m per annum and also for the recovery of any related debt in the event of non payment. He added that the 2018-19 Collection Rates for Business Rates were 98.82% and 97.15% for Council Tax: these rates are currently showing month on month improvement.

He said that Officers make provision in the annual accounts to cover the write-off of debts that cannot be recovered and all of the cases now proposed are covered by such provision. He explained that the Business Rates write-offs will go into the Worcestershire Business Rate Pool accounts for 2019-20 and the costs of non collection will be met by both the Government and the Pool. He further explained that the Council Tax write-off will be included in the 2019-20 Collection Fund accounts and costs shared in line with precept percentages so this Council's share is 12%.

In conclusion he said that appropriate resource is put in to try to recover these debts which relate to key income streams for the Council. Unfortunately sometimes write-off is necessary but this is only done after all avenues have been explored. Debts continue to be monitored even after write-off and will be pursued if possible if circumstances change.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning & Capital Investments moved the recommendations for approval which was seconded by the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure & Community Protection.

Decision: The total of £147,073.26 as detailed in the Appendix to the report, be written off, £136,055.33 for National Non-Domestic Rates and £11,017.93 for Council Tax.

CAB.40 Conversion of property in Stourport on Severn

A report was considered from the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place with outlines the high level business case for converting a property in Stourport on Severn into temporary accommodation that would be run by the Council as an alternative to using private sector Bed & Breakfast (B&B) facilities particularly for families.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning & Capital Investments presented the report. She advised that the property at Raven Street was in the ownership of the District Council and would require refurbishment to bring it up to current required standards. However the property has the potential to support the Council's need for emergency accommodation to fulfil the legal duties under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017).

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning & Capital Investments said that in 2018/19 the authority accommodated 181 households in B&B accommodation and 66 into New Street. She added that an analysis of utilisation rates showed there was a requirement, on average, for a further 12

units of temporary accommodation in addition to New Street.

She further explained that in 2018/19 the Council saw a large number of households with 3 or more children approaching as homeless and requiring temporary accommodation. The rooms at New Street are not really suited to families of this size and this normally means they are placed in two rooms at a B&B.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning & Capital Investments said that the proposal was the right thing to do. She said not only would it save the Council money; it would also enable us to provide suitable facilities for families facing homelessness. She formally moved the recommendations for approval which were seconded by the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure & Community Protection.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor M Hart, said that there was unanimous support from the Committee for the proposal. He said that it was a win win situation; the investment in the asset would provide a revenue saving and the authority would be able to provide a good standard of temporary accommodation.

Decision: In line with the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from its meeting on 7th November 2019:

- 1.1 The proposal to refurbish 11b Raven Street, Stourport on Severn into temporary accommodation be approved.**
- 1.2 Authority be delegated to the Director of Economic Prosperity and Place, in consultation with the Corporate Director: Resources and Solicitor to the Council and the Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Capital Investments to agree the process, timetable and evaluation model for the appointment of a contractor to deliver the refurbishment works and to award the contract to the successful provider.**

RECOMMEND to Council that:

- 1.3 The funding within the Capital Programme currently set aside for Comberton Place (as per the report of 11/07/17) is removed from the Capital Programme and that £60k is reallocated to the Raven Street refurbishment and the remainder returned to the Evergreen Investment Fund as unallocated.**

CAB.41 Wyre Forest District Local Lottery Proposal

A report was considered from the Corporate Director: Community, Well Being and Environment to consider whether to progress with establishing a local lottery for Wyre Forest.

The Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure & Community Protection presented the report and thanked Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their detailed scrutiny of this item. She said she hoped that Members would

agree that the representative from Gatherwell was able to give detailed and helpful answers to their questions. She added Officers had confirmed that after speaking to other nearby local authorities they were pleased with the results of their lotteries so far.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee thanked the Cabinet for giving Committee Members the opportunity to discuss the report.

Having considered the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure & Community Protection said that as Members were aware, the issue of the Community Leadership Fund (CLF) is discussed as part of the budget process each year and was therefore not relevant to the decision being taken by Cabinet this evening. She added that there was no delegation on the face of the report. However linking with the second recommendation from the Committee, there was a need for an appropriate delegation to ensure that the Cabinet does not get tied up with detail. In relation to the cross party working group, she added that she had previously confirmed that there was no requirement for it to be politically balanced and proposed that it should be populated by one member from each political group to ensure that all groups are equally represented.

The Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure & Community Protection formally moved the recommendation, as set out in the report, with an additional recommendation relating to the delegation and membership of the working group. The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning & Capital Investments seconded the proposals.

Decision: Having had regard to the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from its meeting on 7th November 2019, Cabinet decided that:

- 1.1 A local lottery utilising Gatherwell as the external lottery management company is established in Wyre Forest; and**
- 1.2 To delegate to the Corporate Director: Community Well-being and Environment in consultation with a cross-party member working group decisions on approving applications by charities to benefit from the local lottery, decisions on the allocation of the central fund and other related issues. The cross-party member group shall comprise one member from each political group, including the relevant Cabinet portfolio holder.**

Councillor N Desmond left the meeting at this point, (6.36pm).

CAB.42 Social Housing Delivery

A report was considered from the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place on the Motion agreed by Council in May regarding social housing.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Wellbeing & Democratic Services presented the report and thanked the Overview and Scrutiny for their consideration of the item. She formally moved the recommendation for

approval, which was seconded by the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure & Community Protection.

The Leader of the Council expressed his disappointment with the situation and hoped that the authority could come up with innovative ideas within the next 6 months on how certain sites within the District could be taken forward.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning & Capital Investments acknowledged the viability issues that constrains the Council, and hoped that the vision for Lion Fields Parcel 4 in Kidderminster which includes residential development could be delivered.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Wellbeing & Democratic Services said there was no simple solution open to the Council to meet the objective in the motion to enable the Council to build social housing on land already in public ownership.

She added that, whilst the Council can hold up to 199 units of housing without the need for an active Housing Revenue Account (HRA), it does not have the necessary capital receipts to be able to support the financial viability of a housing delivery model.

In conclusion she said that the Council will continue to identify funding sources and initiatives to enable it to enter the housing market and will report on these separately when a suitable initiative is identified.

Decision: In line with the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from its meeting on 7th November 2019, Cabinet agreed:

To continue to monitor the potential to deliver new affordable housing with a view to receiving further reports when a deliverable proposition is available.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 6.50pm.