

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
CABINET
HELD REMOTELY
20TH MAY 2020 (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: J F Byng, A Coleman, N J Desmond, P Dyke, C Edginton-White, I Hardiman, P Harrison, M J Hart, S Miah, M Rayner, C Rogers and L Whitehouse.

CAB.01 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

CAB.02 Declarations of Interests by Members

No declarations of interest were made.

CAB.03 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 11th February 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CAB.04 Call Ins

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

CAB.05 Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There were no items requiring urgent attention.

CAB.06 Public Participation

There was no public participation.

CAB.07 Cabinet Advisory Panel on the Green Agenda

A report was considered from the Chief Executive which sought approval to establish a Cabinet Advisory Panel drawn from members of the Cabinet and from other members of the Council to oversee work on the green agenda.

Councillor P Harrison left the meeting at this point, (6.05pm).

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and formally moved the recommendation for approval. He advised that this was the first advisory panel that the Cabinet had been invited to set up following last year's review of governance and decision-making in the Council.

He said that the review indicated that Cabinet Advisory Panels could be a useful tool for Cabinet members and members outside the Cabinet to work together on complex areas of policy, where it would be helpful to draw on expertise and knowledge from a wider group of members. He added that the green agenda was an ideal candidate for such an advisory panel, and was pleased that the Council's first and only Green Councillor, Vicky Caulfield, had agreed to lead its work.

The Leader confirmed that the two Councillors from the Independent, Liberal Democrat and Green Group who would serve on the panel were Councillors Mary Rayner and Councillor Shazu Miah; and from the Conservative Group it would be Councillors Anna Coleman and Chris Rogers.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services seconded the recommendation. She explained that in May 2019 the Council declared a climate emergency, and unfortunately the district had experienced devastating floods in February 2020. She added that in the last 12 months Council had passed a number of resolutions, which included every child in a Wyre Forest school to be able to be involved in planting a tree; to ensure that adequate electric vehicle charging points are provided in Council owned public car parks; to stop using plastic water cups in Wyre Forest House and to explore any other initiatives for zero emission energy production / storage.

Councillor L Whitehouse joined the meeting at this point, (6.14pm).

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services gave a brief update on the progress on the items and added that the Panel's work programme was expected to focus on actions that the authority can take and implement itself rather than on seeking to influence. She said that the Council would look at its own carbon footprint which would allow it to track any progression as well as reviewing the existing Climate Change Action Plan. In conclusion the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services said she was very much looking forward to being part of the Panel and working alongside other members and partner organisations that were interested and had expertise in these matters.

Decision: A Cabinet Advisory panel be established as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

CAB.08 Financial Stress Testing re Coronavirus Pandemic Impact

A report was considered from the Corporate Director: Resources which provided an early briefing for members on the impact of the current Coronavirus Pandemic on the Council's financial performance for the first quarter of 2020-21 and beyond.

Agenda Item No. 3

The Leader introduced the report. He said that it was a very complex situation and the Government had provided a huge amount of financial assistance initiatives to help the community, businesses and local authorities through the pandemic. He was pleased to announce that the authority was one of the first District Councils to distribute this help to businesses and council tax payers.

He added that, whilst the financial assistance from Government was very welcome, Councils up and down the country were still facing financial difficulties that were not so far covered by the additional Government funding. If the Government did not meet the bulk of the extra costs and loss of income faced by the Council, it would have to look at ways of reducing expenditure on certain discretionary services.

The Leader invited the Corporate Director: Resources to present the report.

The Corporate Director: Resources outlined the key points from the report. She advised that the report set out early estimates that would be refined and improved as time goes on.

She said that the current pandemic was placing unprecedented stress on the Council's budget in the short term. The authority was likely to see the reduction in or even complete failure of some of its income streams for at least three to four months of the year. Together with cost pressures in certain services and cash flow implications, this would mean that the authority would have to take action to safeguard the budget in the medium term.

The Corporate Director: Resources added that the Local Government Association, Societies of District and County Council Treasurers and District Councils' Network continued to lobby hard on the sector's behalf for additional funding. She answered members' questions about the breakdown of costs shown in the report and it was also explained that any property purchases at this time would require additional due diligence before proceeding.

The Leader agreed that a written response would be provided to a member question asking if the Council should put consideration of any further property acquisitions and investments on hold given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic until the market in property stabilizes.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Capital Investments thanked the Corporate Director: Resources and her team for the work they have been doing. She said that the financial briefings provided for Members were excellent. She added that the current financial situation was unpleasant and nobody would have known when the budget was set in February that it would have been thrown into the air with the current Covid-19 situation. She added that the authority would be facing some very challenging decisions if circumstances did not change, and formally moved the recommendations for approval.

On behalf of the Cabinet, the Leader thanked the Corporate Leadership Team for constantly working hard to try and look at the way forward for the district and the way forward out of the current financial plight. He said they were all doing a brilliant job.

The Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Protection seconded the proposals.

Decision:

- 1.1 The projected budgetary impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic outlined in the report and related actions both taken so far and planned for the future be noted.**
- 1.2 Delegated Authority be given to the Corporate Director: Resources in consultation with the Corporate Leadership Team and the Cabinet Member for Strategy and Finance to use General Reserves to replace reduced income and increased expenditure that is not covered by government funding for the period April to end of June 2020.**

CAB.09 Exclusion of Press and Public

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 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

CAB.10 Financial Stress Testing re Coronavirus Pandemic Impact – Appendix 2 Potential Contractual Claim

The Corporate Director: Resources led members in detail through the confidential paper which detailed a potential contractual claim and answered questions from members about it with input from the Chief Executive and Solicitor to the Council

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 7.23pm.