

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

HELD REMOTELY

23RD SEPTEMBER 2020 (6PM)

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**Present:**

Councillors: S Miah (Chairman), P W M Young (Vice-Chairman), J Aston, G W Ballinger, C J Barnett, J F Byng, V Caulfield, S J Chambers, A Coleman, R H Coleman, B S Dawes, N J Desmond, H E Dyke, P Dyke, C Edginton-White, N Gale, S Griffiths, I Hardiman, P Harrison, M J Hart, K Henderson, L J Jones, A L L'Huillier, N Martin, F M Oborski MBE, T L Onslow, M Rayner, C Rogers, S E N Rook, D R Sheppard, J W R Thomas, A Totty and L Whitehouse.

**C.31 Prayers**

Prayers were said by Rev Megan Gibbins, Parish of Ribbesford with Bewdley & Dowles and Wribbenhall Parish.

**C.32 Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

**C.33 Declarations of Interests by Members**

No declarations of Interest were made.

**C.34 Election of Vice-Chairman**

Councillor G W Ballinger nominated Councillor J Aston as Vice-Chairman of the Council for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2020/2021. This was seconded by Councillor P Dyke.

**Decision: Councillor J Aston be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Council for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2020/2021.**

**C.35 Acceptance of Office by the Vice-Chairman**

Councillor J Aston verbally made his Declaration of Acceptance of Office as Vice-Chairman. The Chief Executive informed Members that the Declaration would be signed, and the Badge of Office presented, at an appropriate later time.

The Chairman of the Council welcomed Councillor J Aston as Vice-Chairman and expressed his sincere thanks to Councillor P W M Young for the contribution he had made to the role.

**C.36 Minutes**

**Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2020 and the special**

meeting held on 28th July 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**C.37 Public Participation**

In accordance with the Council's scheme for public participation at meetings of Full Council, one Member of the Public had registered to speak in order to present a petition. The Chairman explained to Members that despite Officers' best efforts they had been unable to contact the speaker to discuss them addressing the Meeting. The Chairman felt that, in order to give the Member of the Public every opportunity to present their petition, the item should be postponed until the December meeting.

**Decision: The acceptance of the petition titled 'Install a nature square in Kidderminster town centre' be delayed until the December meeting to allow the member of the public submitting the petition every opportunity to attend the Council meeting and have their say on the issues behind the petition.**

**C.38 Questions**

No questions had been received.

**C.39 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 the addition of a donation cheque received from Mr Gora who runs the supermarket in Comberton.

**C.40 Leader of the Council Announcements**

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

**C.41 Motions Submitted Under Standing Orders**

There were no motions submitted under Standing Orders.

**C.42 Urgent Motions Submitted Under Standing Orders**

There were no Urgent motions submitted under Standing Orders.

**C.43 Committee Appointments**

Councillor G W Ballinger nominated Councillor M Rayner as Chairman of the Ethics and Standards Committee, Councillor C J Barnett as Vice-Chairman of the Planning Committee and Councillor P W M Young as Vice-Chairman of the Audit Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2020/2021. This was seconded by Councillor F M Oborski, MBE. This filled the two expected casual vacancies and also the vacancy that had arisen since the publication of the agenda. Members were also asked to approve the revised table of political balance that had been circulated.

Upon a show of hands the recommendations, as amended, were carried unanimously.

**Decision: Council**

- 1.1 Agreed the appointment of Councillor Mary Rayner as Chairman of the Ethics and Standards Committee, Councillor Claire Barnett as Vice-Chairman of the Planning Committee and Councillor Peter Young as Vice-Chairman of Audit Committee for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year.**
- 1.2 Approved the revised table of political balance in Appendix 1 of the report.**

**C.44 Overview & Scrutiny Committee Final Report and Recommendations – Consideration of the Flooding Motion from Council**

The Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Councillor M J Hart, delivered the final report and recommendations of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. He thanked Council for mandating this piece of work and expressed thanks to members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for their contribution and diligence. He also thanked the Chief Executive, the Principal Committee and Member Services Officer and the Technical Support Engineers for their work in making the meetings a success and especially enabling members of the public and professionals to address the virtual meetings.

Evidence was considered from a variety of sources, including statutory partners and members of the public, and he was keen that the wording of the report articulated the devastating effects of the floods to properties across the district and the effect of the floods on local businesses. Councillor M J Hart reiterated that the recommendations were unanimously supported by Members across the Council with Cabinet Members and the Leader of the Council observing the exercise. He talked Council through each of the recommendations in detail.

Councillor T L Onslow seconded the recommendations. Councillors were keen to express their support for the findings of the Committee and were grateful to those agencies and members of the public, who took time to address the Overview & Scrutiny Committee with incredible detail. They recognised that residents were still suffering the aftereffects of the flooding with many homes still not fully recovered.

The Chairman of the Council thanked the Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for the manner in which the scrutiny committee was conducted, and named all of the residents personally who contributed to the meeting to acknowledge the contribution they made.

Upon a show of hands the recommendations were carried unanimously.

**Decision: Council agreed that;**

- a) Following the initial review by the Environment Agency in relation to a permanent flood scheme for Beale's Corner, Bewdley, it is imperative and an**

absolute priority that a business case be worked up. A letter be sent to the Environment Agency indicating strong support for permanent flood defences in that area;

b) submissions be made to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and other relevant authorities to support the case for Government funding to alleviate flooding in the Wyre Forest area, both for specific flood defence schemes in the district, in particular Beale's Corner, Bewdley, and for water management interventions being developed by the River Severn Partnership;

c) the Environment Agency be asked to review its barrier deployment procedure for Bewdley in light of the experience in February; to take account of the possibility of extreme local rainfall events. Assurance be sought from the Environment Agency that, until such a time as there is a permanent solution, the temporary barriers are not removed and continue to be deployed in an appropriate way ensuring that they are fit for purpose and that they are an appropriate height. The Environment Agency be invited back to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to give formal feedback on the review;

d) a letter be written to the Member of Parliament for Wyre Forest seeking his full support to lobby for permanent flood defences at Beale's Corner, Bewdley;

e) the authority works with the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), all relevant partners and the Environment Agency in the composition of the business case;

f) while noting that other areas of the district were flooded, in light of the compelling and persuasive arguments received during the scrutiny exercise, the first priority is to press for permanent defences at Beale's Corner, Bewdley on the Wribbehall side;

g) endorsement that the multi-agency approach with the statutory and voluntary partners within the Wyre Forest should continue and that there are appropriate relevant and timely means of communication by all interested stakeholders in particular with those most directly affected, namely businesses and residents;

h) the Environment Agency be asked to look very carefully at the issues surrounding the major impact that Dowles Brook had on the flooding events and to include this area in any future water management interventions.

#### **C.45 COVID-19 Recovery Framework – Results of Remote Working Councillor Survey**

The Leader of the Council introduced the item and the Chief Executive presented a report conveying to Council the results of the Members' survey on remote working. He stated that the results were inconclusive with some Members feeling that remote working was going well and some preferring face to face meetings but with new

## **Agenda Item No. 4**

guidance having just been released from central Government, and a constantly changing situation, there would not be a change to current practices for the foreseeable future. It was noted that there had been an increase in Members attending meetings as observers since meetings had been held virtually.

The Leader of the Council acknowledged that not everyone was ideally placed to work from home, but committed to supporting those with issues where possible.

Discussion from Members ensued with universal appreciation for the ICT Team for the support they offered to allow working from home and successful virtual meetings. Councillor N J Desmond added that he felt face to face meetings were optimal due to the interaction with other Members and Officers, and explained the difficulty of 6pm meetings for Members with young families at home. It was agreed that the situation had gone on longer than most people expected and Councillor N J Desmond suggested that it would be in the interest of democracy to revert to thirty-minute questions, to allow supplementary questions, lift the cap on motions and to consider the standing orders that require meetings to be finished by 8pm. Although these restrictions had been put in place to help initial meetings, he felt that virtual meetings were going well enough to mean that these restrictions were no longer needed. Altering them would enable the executive to be held to account and would be in line with Worcestershire County Council.

The Solicitor to the Council informed Members that the previous agreements had been put in place for 6 months so changes could be proposed at the next full Council meeting. The Leader of the Council responded that all comments would be considered but he would not comment on possible changes until Officers and Group Leaders had been consulted.

Councillor S Griffiths raised the issue of ensuring there was adequate mental health support for staff. Councillor M J Hart agreed that it was as important to ensure there were no risks to mental health as to physical health.

**Decision: Council;**

**1.1 NOTED the findings of the Members' Survey – Remote Working summarised in the report;**

**1.2 NOTED that remote meetings by members will be kept under review, in consultation with the Chairman of Council and Group Leaders, taking the findings of the consultation into consideration when changes to the current arrangements become possible.**

### **C.46 Policy and Budget Framework – Matters which require a decision by Council**

**(a) Recommendations from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 8<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

- Annual Report on Treasury Management Service and Actual Prudential Indicators 2019-20**

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Councillor M J Hart presented the recommendations for approval. He thanked Members of the Treasury Management Review Panel for the work they had completed, which he stated was

even more important at the current time . The Leader of the Council seconded the proposal.

**Decision:**

**1.1 The actual 2019-20 prudential and treasury indicators in the report be approved;**

**1.2 The actual 2019-20 non-treasury prudential indicators for Capital Portfolio Fund property acquisitions be approved;**

**1.3 The annual treasury management report for 2019-20, including information on the non-treasury prudential indicators for Capital Portfolio Fund acquisitions be noted.**

There being no further business the meeting ended at 7:29pm.