

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

HELD REMOTELY

THURSDAY, 5TH NOVEMBER 2020 (6PM)

Present:

Councillors: M J Hart (Chairman), S J Chambers (Vice-Chairman), N J Desmond, C Edginton-White, S Griffiths, S Miah, T L Onslow, M Rayner, S E N Rook and D R Sheppard.

Observers

Councillors: G W Ballinger, J F Byng, A Coleman, R H Coleman, H E Dyke, N Martin, F M Oborski MBE, C Rogers and P W M Young.

OS.48 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence

OS.49 Appointment of Substitutes

No substitutes were appointed

OS.50 Declarations of Interests by Members

Councillor C Edginton-White declared, in respect of agenda item 10 – Establishment of Independent Museum Trust, that she was the Bewdley Town Council representative on the Bewdley Museum Management Board.

OS.51 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on the 3rd September and the minutes of the meeting held on 8th September 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

OS.52 “How are we doing?” Performance Update

The Committee considered a report from the Business Improvement Officer which updated members on the performance of the Council for quarter 2, from 1st July to 30th September 2020.

The Business Improvement Officer presented the report and appendices which included an exception report detailing those actions that were overdue or cancelled; detailed reports of performance against the Council’s purposes of ‘People’ and ‘Business’; a business tracker report, and a report on the Council’s capital projects.

The Committee considered each page of the report and appendices in turn.

Agreed: The progress in performance for quarter 2 be noted.

OS.53 Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy Mid Year Report 2020/21

The Committee received a report from the Corporate Director: Resources which provided members with a mid-year review of the Council's treasury management policies, practices and activities in accordance with the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice. The Committee also considered the recommendations from the Treasury Management Review Panel from its meeting on 2nd November 2020.

The Corporate Director: Resources led members through the report and outlined the key issues. She advised that this was the second of the 3 statutory reports which would be presented to the Committee in the current municipal year. She said that the report had been fully scrutinised by members of the Treasury Management Review Panel and a representative from the Council's Treasury Advisors, Link Asset Services, had provided an in-depth economic briefing to supplement the report.

The Corporate Director: Resources was pleased to advise that there were no breaches to report and all the treasury management activities were in full compliance with the Council's approved strategy. She reminded members that the next Treasury Management training session for members was scheduled to take place on 4th February 2021 and, given the ongoing economic volatility in the global markets which impact on treasury management, urged all members to attend.

Agreed: The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Council to:

Approve Treasury Management Mid-year Review and updated Prudential Indicators and Ratios in the report.

OS.54 Green Homes Grant – Local Authority Delivery Scheme

The Committee considered a report from the Head of Strategic Growth which outlined the process for the Government-funded Green Homes Grants to be made available to homeowners where their properties have poor energy efficiency and they have a low household income.

The Head of Strategic Growth presented the report. She explained that the authority had supported a Wychavon-led joint bid by Worcestershire Councils and had been awarded £200k for measures to properties in Wyre Forest. She said that there was some flexibility in that, if any council under spends its allocation, the funding can go to areas where a higher demand has been identified.

Members were advised that grants would be delivered through a process whereby the Private Sector Housing team would identify likely eligible properties and directly market the opportunity to them. She added that, if there was insufficient take up through this route, the grants would be promoted via social media.

The Committee welcomed the report and acknowledged the eligibility criteria of household income of less than £30k; and suggested that applications for households on the lower part of the income threshold should be prioritised.

Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet:

1.1 to recommend to Council that there is an amendment to the Capital programme by £300k to provide Green Homes Grants (to be recovered by funding from BEIS) noting that the exact level of expenditure will be dependent on the number of eligible applicants and grant funding received.

1.2 That delegation be given to Officers to prepare an income hierarchy formula for the allocation of grants if practicable to do so.

OS.55 Amendment to the Capital Portfolio Fund Acquisition Geography

The Committee considered a report from the Corporate Director: Resources and the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place which set out the proposed temporary arrangements for the acquisition geography for the Capital Portfolio Fund during the uncertain times brought about by the Coronavirus pandemic.

The Corporate Director: Resources led members through the report and outlined the key issues. She reminded members that the Council's current Capital Portfolio Fund policy was that it would always be the Council's preference to invest within the district area to support regeneration and local economic development, whilst allowing the Council to consider opportunities within the wider geographical area of the two Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) which the authority is a member of. She further explained that the temporary arrangements were to limit any further acquisitions of properties through the Fund to be within Wyre Forest district only.

The Committee discussed the report and thanked the Corporate Director: Resources and the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place for a very thorough and comprehensive report.

Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet that:

The proposed temporary limitation of the geography for Capital Portfolio Fund purchases is agreed.

OS.56 Response to Consultation on Homeworking

The Committee considered a report from the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place which set out the responses received to the consultation with employees and unions in respect of homeworking as agreed by Council in July.

The Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place presented the report and outlined the key issues.

The Committee discussed the report and several concerns were raised about the low number of responses and the negativity of the majority of the comments

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received. Members acknowledged that more homeworking was introduced as a result of Government guidance in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Members were concerned about the mental health issues raised and the majority of the Committee felt there was not a clear mandate to proceed and the process should be halted and revised post April 2021.

The Chairman lost his IT connection at this point (7.24pm); the Vice Chairman chaired the meeting in his absence.

At 7.43pm the Committee agreed unanimously to suspend Council Procedure Rule (Standing Orders) 1.1 (iii) to allow the meeting to continue past 8pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 7.44pm and resumed at 7.51pm. The Chairman returned to the meeting and resumed the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services assured members that mental health and well-being was very important to the Council, and extra support would be offered to employees where issues had been raised.

Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet that:

The consultation responses together with the Corporate Leadership Team responses are noted.

When the item is reported to Council at its December meeting, Council should place a halt on proceedings and review after April 2021, and any such fresh proposals should be subject to a further staff consultation.

OS.57

Establishment of Independent Museum Trust

The Committee considered a report from the Chief Executive which set out the proposed steps necessary to establish Bewdley Museum as a fully independent trust, no longer part of Wyre Forest District Council. Once fully in place the only relationship would be that the Council would expect to be the principal funding partner.

The Chief Executive presented the report and outlined the key issues. The Committee fully scrutinised the report which included the main recommendations that will be considered by Cabinet. Members agreed that it was important that consideration be given to exploring a reversion clause to protect the buildings and to ensure the collection remained in Wyre Forest in the event of a failure of the new museum trust, and clarification was sought that the rights of depositors would not be affected.

Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet that:

The Overview and Scrutiny support the recommendations to Cabinet set out in paragraph 2.1 of the report, with the suggested minor amendments to 2.1.2 and 2.1.3 (c).

OS.58 Work Programme

The Chairman announced that there were currently no items listed on the work programme for members to consider at the December and January meetings. He said that if no items were put forward for scrutiny, the meetings would be cancelled.

OS.59 Press Involvement

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

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 8.52pm.