

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
CABINET
HELD REMOTELY
9TH FEBRUARY 2021 (6PM)**

Present:

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

Observers:

Councillors: C J Barnett, J F Byng, R H Coleman, N J Desmond, S Griffiths, I Hardiman, M J Hart, K Henderson, S Miah, F M Oborski MBE, M Rayner, C Rogers, L Whitehouse and P W M Young.

CAB.52 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

CAB.53 Declarations of Interests by Members

No declarations of interest were made.

CAB.54 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 22nd December 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CAB.55 Call Ins

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

CAB.56 Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There were no items requiring urgent attention.

CAB.57 Public Participation

There was no public participation.

CAB.58 Future High Streets Fund

A report was considered from the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place following the announcement of the Council's successful bid for Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) monies and to recommend a consequential amendment to the Capital Programme.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Capital Investments and for Localism, presented the report which set out the full background details of the bid and outlined the proposed project delivery and governance arrangements for delivering FHSF programme in the agreed time line.

She reminded members that the Council was notified on 26th December 2020 it had been successful with its submission to Government for the newly FHSF. She explained that the Council was one of 15 successful applicants to be awarded funding unconditionally; 57 further projects had only received provisional funding.

Councillor I Hardiman joined the meeting at this point.

She added that the Council had received the full funding request, which was the fifth highest award of all the bidders. The projects comprising the bid was the improvement of the former Crown House site and bull ring; the acquisition of key properties in Worcester Street to improve access to the Lionfields site in Bromsgrove Street and the refurbishment of the old magistrates court and indoor market on Worcester Street.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Capital Investments and for Localism, formally moved the recommendations for approval; she said that the project had to be one of the most exciting things that Wyre Forest District Council had been involved in for many years and hoped her Cabinet colleagues would support the proposals.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services said it was an excellent project and looked forward to it going forward.

The Leader of the Council seconded the recommendations which were unanimously supported by the Cabinet.

Decision: The Cabinet RECOMMEND to Council:

- 1.1 That the Capital Programme is amended to accommodate the sum of £21.761m to ensure the delivery of the Future High Streets Fund programme of initiatives. Funding will be met from the £20.51m external funding award and £1.25m allocation following the principles of, but in addition to, the existing Capital Portfolio Fund for co-funding from this Council.**

Cabinet AGREED:

- 1.2 To delegate authority to the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning & Capital Investments to establish the governance arrangements set out in the report to oversee the delivery of the Future High Streets Fund programme;**
- 1.3 To delegate authority to the said Director in consultation with said Cabinet Member to take decisions as required to ensure that**

the projects comprising the Future High Streets Fund programme are delivered, including, but not limited to:

- a) The appointment of specialist advisers (in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedures);**
- b) The preparation of specifications and procurement of contractors (in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedures);**
- c) The soft testing of the most appropriate delivery model for the commercial development sites associated with the FHSF works;**
- d) The soft testing of the most appropriate delivery model for the future operation of the former Magistrates' Court building.**

CAB.59 Pay and Grading Review

A report was considered from the Chief Executive to make recommendations to Council in respect of approval and implementation of the pay and grading review and associated personnel issues.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval.

She said it was an aim of the Administration to ensure that Council staff were appropriately paid for the work they do and as such Council agreed in 2019 that the authority would apply the national pay increases from April 2021. It was also agreed that there would be a pay and grading review in order to modernise the Council's pay structure and ensure that staff on the lowest paid jobs within the authority were lifted above the national living wage.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services said she was delighted that there was overwhelming support from the Union ballots and that a collective agreement had been reached. She said that whilst most staff members would benefit from the review, the lowest paid will benefit the most. She explained that there were a few staff who would be adversely affected and an arrangement had been agreed to protect their pay for 18 months.

In conclusion, she said that the Council's staff continually go the extra mile and whatever is asked of them; they deliver. She said it was appropriate that the Council should recognise the contribution of its staff for their hard work during the pandemic with a one-off payment.

The Leader seconded the proposals. He said the agreement of the pay and grading review was a substantial achievement for the authority going forward. He acknowledged the hard work that had gone into the process by Trade Unions, the Human Resources Team, Chief Executive, and the Cabinet

Member.

Decision: The Cabinet RECOMMEND to Council that:

- 1.1
- a) it approves the implementation of the pay and grading review, as summarised in appendix 1;
 - b) it approves a non-consolidated COVID response acknowledgement payment of £125 for every employee who was employed continuously between 26 March 2020 and 31 December 2020 and who undertook regular work during that period, other than staff on the Deputy Chief Officer grade or higher;
 - c) it adopts the revised pay policy statement for the financial year 2020-21 and each subsequent financial year, until it is amended by Council (appendix 2).

**CAB.60 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021-2024
Capital Strategy 2021-2031**

A report was considered from the Corporate Director: Resources which provided an update on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2021-2024 and sought to make recommendations to Council on the proposed budget decision. The report also sought approval of the Capital Strategy for 2021-2031 including prudential indicators which set limits for non-financial investments and to fulfil the key requirements of the MHCLG Investment Guidance.

The Leader presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval. He said the report presented the Cabinet Budget proposals to balance the books following one of the most challenging years in Wyre Forest District Council's history. It included recommendations for both the Revenue budget and the Capital Strategy.

He added that the Council had already been facing a £1.7 million shortfall by 2022-23 before Covid-19 struck, putting extra demands on services and resources and drastically reducing income. And although Government funding had offset some of the costs of the pandemic, it did not cover all costs and losses incurred and the funding gap was now forecast to increase to £2.7m by the end of 2023-24.

The Leader said the Final Settlement was issued on Thursday 4th February and would be debated in parliament tomorrow. There were no significant changes from the Provisional Settlement which provided additional one-off funding for 2021-22 of £869k. He explained that disappointingly there was no flexibility to allow the discretion for districts to approve slightly higher council tax increases without a referendum. He added that the new funding, however was very welcome but would not fundamentally change the Council's funding position as the new funding was for one-year only. He added that table 6.2 of the report showed variations to the December Cabinet report.

In conclusion he said that this MTFS was set against the greatest uncertainty and resultant risk the Council had ever faced. The Cabinet proposals represent a realistic way forward that will allow the authority to balance the books in the wake of the most challenging period in the Council's history

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Capital Investments and for Localism seconded the proposals.

Decision: The CABINET having re-considered the Financial Strategy 2021-2024, the results of the Budget consultation exercise, alternative budget proposal and recommendations of the Strategic Review Panel RECOMMENDS TO COUNCIL that it:

1.1 THREE YEAR BUDGET, CAPITAL STRATEGY AND POLICY FRAMEWORK 2021-2024

1.1.1 APPROVES the updated Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2021-2024;

1.1.2 APPROVES the Cabinet Proposals – taking into account the impact on the Council's Capital and Revenue Budgets for 2021-2024 as shown in the tables in paragraphs 6.1 and 6.3 and as set out below:

a) Approval of a further programme of phased savings for the strategic repositioning of the Council from the Wyre Forest Forward Savings Programme included in tables 6.3 and 6.5.1 of £0.8m in 2021-22, £1.2m in 2022-23, £1.5m in 2023-24 ongoing after this year;

b) Approval of £200k generic capital budget to support expansion of the Council's income generating activity, to be funded from prudential borrowing with the revenue costs met from within approved financially viable business cases. The Innovation Fund will be used to fund any one-off revenue business case costs.

c) Approval of a reduced Community Leadership Fund of £16.5k being £500 per Councillor in 2021-22, followed by £8.5k being £250 per Councillor in 2022-23 and zero thereafter.

1.1.3 APPROVES the fees and charges in line with this Strategy and in line with the recommendations of the Licensing and Environmental Committee of 9th December 2020, and the impact on the Council's Revenue Budget for 2021-2024, as shown in Appendix 3;

1.1.4 APPROVES The removal of the priority about affordable housing from the Corporate Plan as set out in Appendix 6.

1.1.5 APPROVES the Council's updated Capital Strategy including the

following indicators and limits that will be further revised for the February 2021 Council Meeting following any changes to the Capital Programme brought about as a result of the budget process:

- a) Approval of the Capital Strategy 2021-2031 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 2020 Cabinet);
- c) Approval of the limits for gross debt of non treasury 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 22nd December 2020 report.

1.1.6 APPROVES that any Final Accounts savings arising from 2020-2024 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 Strategy and Finance;

1.1.7 The General Fund Revenue Budget be APPROVED including all updates from the position in December 2020 as set out in the report.

1.2 COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATES

1.2.1

- a) SETS the Council Tax for Wyre Forest District Council on a Band D Property at £224.34 for 2021-2022 (£219.34 2020-2021) which represents an increase of 2.28% on Council Tax from 2020-2021.
- b) ENDORSES the provisional Council Tax on a Band D Property in 2022-2023 of £229.34 and £234.34 in 2023-2024, being increases of 2.23% and 2.18% respectively.

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

1.2.3 NOTES that the Local Council Tax Support Grant in 2021-22 will initially be added to General Fund Reserves to offset the Collection Fund loss as a result of the reduction in Council Tax

Base and APPROVAL of delegation to the Corporate Director: Resources in liaison with the Cabinet Member for Strategy and Finance to divert any portion of this for Hardship relief if appropriate.

1.3 Cabinet APPROVED that:

1.3.1 Delegated authority is given to the Corporate Director: Resources, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Strategy and Finance/Leader of the Council, to make any appropriate adjustments to the General Fund Revenue Budget recommended under paragraph 1.1.7 above, as a result of any further notifications from Central Government.

1.4 The Cabinet NOTED in line with the recommendations of the Strategic Review Panel:

1.4.1 The Alternative budget proposals as detailed within Appendix 5 of the report, further noting that updated versions as appropriate will be provided for Full Council on the 24th February 2021.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 6.37pm.

The full meeting is available for viewing on the Council's website <https://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/53298>