

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

HELD REMOTELY

24TH FEBRUARY 2021 (6PM)

Present:

Councillors: S Miah (Chairman), J Aston (Vice-Chairman), 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, L Whitehouse and P W M Young.

A moment of silence was observed in memory of former Wyre Forest District Council Chairman and councillor, Mike Salter who sadly passed away on the night of Wednesday 20 January.

C.58 Prayers

Prayers were said by Councillor P Young.

C.59 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

C.60 Declarations of Interests by Members

Councillor T Onslow declared, in respect of agenda item number 15 – Council Tax Setting 2021-2022, that she was the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for West Mercia, and the PCC set the Council Tax for The Office of the PCC.

C.61 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 9th December 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

C.62 Public Participation

There was no public participation.

C.63 Questions

One question had been submitted in accordance with Standing Order Section 7, 1.8 by Members of the Council.

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Question from Councillor Anna Coleman to the Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Capital Investments and for Localism

With an aim to secure the community involvement in the new Bewdley Museum Trust, would Cabinet Member agree to consider a formation of an advisory group to the trustees, which will represent the established successful town community organisations?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Capital Investments and for Localism

Thank you for your question. Working within the localism agenda over the past two years, I have become more and more aware of the local organisations and groups that exist and work for our communities in our three towns. Their time and commitment is amazing and I do understand their concern when it is looked at doing things differently; even though with the idea of the setting up of an independent trust for Bewdley museum it is being done as well with a view to help protect the future and sustainability of the museum with continued funding from Wyre Forest District Council. I understand that concerns may have been raised further by the comments from our MP calling it a “dumb” idea in the press without having met with anyone from Wyre Forest District Council to understand or talk about these proposals. May I assure everyone that the adverts for the roles of trustees will be advertised widely with a view of attracting the variety of skills needed for the continued success of the museum. I do not feel it would be appropriate for us to set up groups for the trustees to work with before they are in place and know what they are looking for. When they are in place it should be their choice who they decide to work with and may well include the setting up of some form of liaison group with representatives from the local community. I have no problem with making the new trustees, when they are in place, aware of the variety of organisations and groups working in Bewdley that may be able to assist them in some way with the future for the museum. As Councillor Coleman may be aware, myself and the Chief Executive will be meeting some representatives of Bewdley organisations next week.

C.64 Chairman’s Communications

The Council received a list of functions attended by the Chairman or Vice-Chairman since the Council’s last meeting.

C.65 Leader of the Council Announcements

The Leader of the Council made the following announcements:

Since Council’s last meeting, on Boxing Day, we had the excellent news of the £20.5m grant from the Future High Streets Fund – our officers have put in a huge amount of work on that. It was an item started off by the Conservative Administration which we are very grateful for. The grant is the single largest competitive grant award secured by the District Council in its

history since 1974.

Council tonight is being asked to agree a consequential amendment to the capital programme. The hard work on implementing all of these exciting projects that form part of our bid is already under way, and we have got until 2024 to complete it which is not long, staff are working hard already to get that underway. I know Council would want to join me in paying tribute to everyone who has been involved in achieving the successful grant award. I should mention, Ostap Paparega and Jon Elmer in North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration and Mike Parker, the Corporate Director with responsibility for planning.

It is good to see other items that are going ahead with local enterprise initiatives in the District. They include:

- the Churchfields highway scheme which was completed by Worcestershire County Council last month but funded with a Homes England grant of £3m secured by the District Council together with contributions from our two local enterprise partnerships namely the Worcestershire LEP and the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP;*
- major investments at Silverwoods by Community Housing Group in 65 independent living apartments in phase 2 of Berrington Court and by Birton Firtop in their new manufacturing facility. They are moving from a neighboring authority and it is good that staff have secured that enterprise coming into our area; and*
- the County Council's improvements at the Hoobrook roundabout, to reduce congestion. Residents have been waiting for that for along time and it is good to see it is underway and look forward to it being completed.*

The floods came back again in January following Strom Christoph. It affected Bewdley yet again, and Stourport to a lesser extent. Our thoughts go out to all those residents that were affected and had to move out of their houses and had water lapping at their doors. Many of you would have seen the recent BBC Midlands Today 20-minute programme, which really highlighted precisely how difficult it is with climate change; and it is affecting all of us and is a serious subject. Unlike Mr. Trump who dismissed it and said that is something created by the Chinese, we are serious about it in this area and we want to make sure we do something about it. However, the Government is saying there are not sufficient funds to do that.

I must thank our own staff that again that went that extra mile with their assistance to those who were affected both immediately and as part of the ongoing clear up. I wrote to the Secretary of State, George Eustice, immediately afterwards to press the case again for Government funding for permanent flood defences to protect Beale's Corner. There is heightened concern about the position because the Environment Agency has decided not to deploy the temporary barriers at present. We will discuss a motion on this topic on tonight's agenda.

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Since the last meeting of Council, I have made some changes to the membership of the Cabinet. I would like to extend thanks again to Councillor Fran Oborski for her contribution to the work of the Cabinet in the period from May 2019 to last month, and also for her great assistance in helping to set up the Progressive Alliance two years ago and that was crucial. When I announced that she was leaving the Cabinet, I made some changes to portfolios including appointing Councillor Helen Dyke as Deputy Leader and I said that I would review membership of the Cabinet and make a further announcement in due course.

I am able to inform Council that, tomorrow, I intend to appoint Councillor Mary Rayner as a member of the Cabinet and that she will take over the finance portfolio from me primarily, other adjustments will be made in the coming days. There will be other thoughts on individual portfolios, and we will set that out in a formal decision later in the week. Councillor Rayner, as a consequence, will cease to serve as chairman of the Ethics and Standards Committee, and I will invite Council under item 11 on the agenda to appoint a replacement for the period to the Annual General Meeting.

Finally, I would also like to make a personal announcement. When I was re-elected to the council in May 2019, I was honoured to work with colleagues in various political parties and groups to secure a change in the Council's political direction and leadership, and it was a deeply personal honour for me to be elected as leader in May 2019 which was almost 35 years after I had last held that office; I appreciated that gesture.

Much has happened over the last two years, and much has changed. All members of the District Council of all parties can be proud of what has been done in maintaining services and securing investments and improvements in Wyre Forest, notwithstanding the impact of the dreadful pandemic over the last 12 months.

My term of office as leader ends in May 2023, I shall be getting on a bit by then. I have been reflecting on whether I should serve for the full term or, now that we have reached almost the half way point in the life of this council, and an element of good stability stand aside in order to allow for transition to new leadership.

After considerable discussion and further consultation with colleagues and others, I am therefore informing Council now that I plan to resign as leader at the time of the AGM in May. Council will be invited at that meeting to elect a new leader for the period to the elections in May 2023, and I will work to ensure that there is a full and smooth transition.

I will remain as a councillor and as a member of the Progressive Alliance, and I will provide my full support for the election of the Alliance's candidate-designate for the role of leader, namely Councillor Helen Dyke. I hope that colleagues will find it helpful to have this forewarning of my plans. I thought rather than do this at the annual meeting, it was best to do it now and I wanted to get somebody in place to take on my finance portfolio which is crucial to the work of the Council.

C.66 Motions Submitted under Standing Orders

One motion had been received in accordance with Standing Orders (Section 7, 4.1).

1. Notice of motion from Councillor C Edginton-White

Further to the thorough review of the 2020 floods by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Council's resolution in September 2020, Council:

(a) notes with dismay that properties at Beale's Corner and elsewhere in the district were flooded again following Storm Christoph;

(b) pays tribute to the response of the Environment Agency, blue light services and other organisations to the flooding;

(c) expresses concern that the temporary barrier at Beale's Corner is not being deployed by the Agency at the moment, giving a greater probability of disruption to the local community from road flooding and increasing the vulnerability of some properties;

(d) asks the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to request an early update from Worcestershire County Council and the Environment Agency on the outcome of the initial investigation into the potential highway issues and the failure of the temporary barrier;

(e) calls on the Leader of the County Council to ensure that any necessary measures required to reinforce and repair the highway to ensure future deployment of the temporary barrier are delivered as a matter of urgency;

(f) strongly endorses the letter that the Leader has sent to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to call for urgent confirmation of Government funding for permanent barriers at Beale's Corner; and

(g) decides that this resolution should be communicated to the Secretary of State, Chair of the Environment Agency, Leader of the County Council and Mark Garnier MP.

Councillor C Edginton-White presented the motion. In doing so she acknowledged the work that had already taken place to gather evidence from residence and the agencies with regard to the serious flooding events of February 2020 and the recognition by all agencies that permanent flood defences are a priority for Beales Corner and the town end of Stourport road in Bewdley.

She explained that from site visits, initial investigations and interim reports already been provided by the Environment Agency, it appeared that there are major concerns about the surface and sub structure of the highway adjacent to the river bank in Stourport road up to the Beales corner

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junction. Until the safety issues to the road are resolved the temporary barriers cannot be re-deployed. She added that the motion aims to invite not just the Environment Agency but also Worcestershire County Council to collaborate in an effective resolution to these issues so that the temporary barriers can be re-instated while not compromising the funding of the permanent scheme moving forward. She said that she will be asking the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to add this as an agenda item of the Committee at his earliest convenience.

The motion was seconded by Councillor A Coleman. She thanked the Council's Housing and Water Management Teams for the work they are doing in processing Defra grants for the affected households and businesses.

A discussion ensued. Several members spoke in support of the motion.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor M Hart, said it was important to keep the issue in the forefront of everybody's minds. He said that the Environment Agency had been invited to attend a meeting and he would like the committee to consider who else they would like to hear further and better information from as it had been a multi-agency response to the incidents. He said that the flooding was devastating to those residents who had endured it and said that the Conservative Group fully supported the motion.

Decision: Upon a show of hands, the motion was unanimously agreed.

C.67 Urgent Motions submitted under Standing Orders

There were no urgent motions submitted under Standing Orders.

C.68 Political Balance

A report was considered from the Solicitor to the Council to approve the revised table of political balance.

The Leader presented the report and formally moved an amendment to the recommendations set out at paragraph 2.2 of the report. The proposed amendment was displayed electronically for all members to read and consider.

http://www.wyreforest.gov.uk/council/docs/doc56538_20210224_council_minute.pdf

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

In regard to 2.2 (b) of the amendment, Councillor F Oborski MBE said that Councillor A Totty had not resigned from the Audit Committee and felt it was totally inappropriate to change a Chairman when there was only one meeting of the committee left in this municipal year. She added that at considerable expense to the Council, Councillor Totty had gone to London

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to undertaken training as Chairman of the Audit Committee and moved an amendment to the amendment that he be confirmed as Chairman of the Audit Committee until the annual meeting of Council in May. Councillor Oborski's amendment was seconded by Councillor S Miah.

Councillor M Hart said that he did not have any issues with the other parts of the Leader's amendment. However seeking to remove a sitting Chairman that had not resigned prior to annual Council was not in the spirit of working with all political groups and parties; and was not in the spirit of openness and transparency. He added that it was completely the wrong time and the Conservative Group would support the amendment put forward by Councillor Oborski.

A discussion ensued. Several members spoke in support of the amendment proposed by Councillor Oborski as they agreed it was not the appropriate time to change the Chairmanship of the Audit Committee.

The Leader said the Chair of the Audit Committee was a very important position. The post holder had access to a lot of detailed information regarding the Council's finances and in his opinion the post holder needs to be a member of the Administration. He added that Councillor R Coleman had the appropriate financial skills to take on this very important role and would be able to 'hit the ground running'; it was something that could not be left in abeyance for the next couple of months before that post was taken by a member of the Administration.

A vote on the amendment proposed by Councillor Oborski was taken and agreed.

A vote on the substantive motion was taken and agreed.

Decision: Council;

1.1 Approved the revised table of political balance in Appendix 1.

1.2 Appointed:

- a) Councillor Helen Dyke as vice chairman of the Appointments and Appeals Committee;**
- b) Councillor Anna L'Huilier as chairman of the Ethics and Standards Committee, all appointments to take effect from the date of this meeting for the remainder of the municipal year 2020/21.**

C.69

Polling Place Review

Council considered a report from the Returning Officer for the Council to take decisions following the review of polling districts and places in the wards of Blakebrook & Habberley South and Franche & Habberley North,

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which was commissioned at Council on 26th February 2020.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services presented the report and formally moved the recommendation for approval. The Leader of the Council seconded the proposals.

A robust discussion ensued. Following a show of hands, the vote was carried.

Decision: Council NOTED the responses to the consultation and CONFIRMED that no change is made to the polling places in the wards of Blakebrook & Habberley South and Franche & Habberley North.

C.70 Policy and Budget Framework

Matters which require a Decision by Council.

a) Recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 4th February 2021

- Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy 2021-22

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny presented the recommendations and formally moved them for approval. The proposal was seconded by the Chairman of the Treasury Management Review Panel, Councillor S Miah.

Upon a show of hands, the vote was carried unanimously.

Decision: Council;

- 1.1 Approved the restated Prudential Indicators and Limits for the financial years 2021-22 to 2030-31 included in Appendix 3. (Revisions have been made, as per paragraph 7.2 of the report, following changes to the Capital Programme brought about as part of the budget process and are reflected in the schedule that followed Council approval).**
- 1.2 Approved the updated Treasury Management and Investment Policy and Strategy Statements for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 (the associated Prudential Indicators are included in Appendix 3 and the detailed criteria is included in Section 10 and Appendix 5).**
- 1.3 Approved the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement that sets out the Council's policy on MRP included in Appendix 1.**

- 1.4 **Approved the Authorised Limit Prudential Indicator included in Appendix 3.**
- 1.5 **Noted that the separate, but intrinsically linked, Capital Strategy 2021-31 to be approved separately by Council, sets out the policy statement covering non-treasury investments including the related suite of prudential indicators.**

(b) Recommendations from Cabinet – 9th February 2021

- Amendment to Capital Programme to include Future High Streets Fund project

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Capital Investments and for Localism presented the recommendations and formally moved them for approval. She said that she had worked in the town centre for approximately 45 years and this had to be the most exciting thing to happen to Kidderminster town centre in that time. She thanked everybody who was involved in the project and hoped that Council would support the proposal.

The Leader seconded the proposal and upon a show of hands, the vote was carried unanimously.

Decision: 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.

At 7.50pm Council agreed unanimously to suspend the Council Procedure Rules (Standing Orders) 1.1 (iii) to allow the meeting to continue until 10pm.

(c) Recommendations from Cabinet – 9th February 2021

- Pay and Grading Review

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services presented the recommendations. She said the administration believes staff should be appropriately paid for the work that they do; that is why the authority was going back to applying national pay increases from April, as Council decided in 2019.

She added that the Council's approach to local pay prior to 2019 gave certainty in financial planning and saved the Council money but this was at the price of how much the staff took home each month; it hit them in their pockets. The NJC pay award for April 2020 was 2.75% compared to the local agreed increase of 1.25%.

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The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services further explained that Council also agreed in 2019 that there should be a pay and grading review to modernise the pay structure and ensure that staff in the lowest paid jobs are lifted above the National Living Wage. She said she was delighted that the outcome has been backed by overwhelming results in the union ballots and that we can conclude a collective agreement.

She added that, as the table in paragraph 4.2 of the report to Cabinet showed, most staff would benefit from the review; the lowest paid staff will be benefitting the most. She said there are a few staff who will unfortunately be adversely affected. However arrangements to protect their pay for 18 months have been agreed with the unions. She added it would not be appropriate to comment on individual cases and said Council needed to focus on the overall package negotiated with the unions. She said Council approval was needed as the cost falls outside the remit set by Council in September 2019. She assured members that the medium term financial strategy, on the agenda later, takes into account of the impact and it is affordable in the context of the MTFS.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services added that the Council's staff had gone the extra mile and done everything that local residents, businesses or councillors have asked of them in the last unprecedented year. She said it was appropriate that the Council should recognize their contribution and need to go beyond the many warm "thank you" messages that Councillors and Council had given. That is why the Cabinet has recommended a modest one-off payment, funded from underspends on the salary budget this year.

In conclusion, she said there was a need to amend the pay policy statement to reflect the return to using national pay increases and the changes arising from the pay and grading review. In line with previous statements, the statement has been drafted to avoid the need to update it every year.

The Leader seconded the proposals.

A lengthy debate ensued. Several members spoke for and against the recommendations. Councillor Hart spoke on behalf of the Conservative Group. He said whilst they agreed in principle with the review as it was right and proper that the authority paid its staff the national living wage; however, concerns were raised about the overall funding envelope. He said it was not the right time to put the extra financial burden on the Council and the Group could not support the pay and grading review as it currently stood.

Upon a show of hands, the vote on the recommendations was carried.

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- a) **approved the implementation of the pay and grading review, as summarised in appendix 1;**
- b) **approved 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) **adopted the revised pay policy statement for the financial year 2020-21 and each subsequent financial year, until it is amended by Council (appendix 2).**

The meeting was suspended at 8.40pm and resumed at 8.52pm.

C.71 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021-2024

A report was considered from the Corporate Director: Resources which sought approval of the Council's budget for 2021-2024 having considered the proposed decision and budget reports recommended to Council by Cabinet on 9th February 2021 including:

- Base Budget Projections 2021-2024 including Cabinet Proposals
- Capital Programme 2020-2021 onwards
- Updated Capital Programme Non Treasury Prudential Indicators 2020-24
- Fees and Charges
- Report of the Chief Financial Officer in respect of Sections 25-28 Local Government Act 2003
- Amendment to the Corporate Plan

The Leader of the Council presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval. He said the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was set against the greatest uncertainty and resultant risk the Council had ever faced. He said the 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.

Councillor Desmond moved a suite of amendments, as set out on pages 45 to 50 of the report, on behalf of the Conservative Group. He said that the proposed budget strategy had been well crafted over many weeks and was a genuine attempt to give real strategic direction to the authority, addressing the financial gap whilst delivering real benefits to the residents of Wyre Forest. He said the two strategies were similar in that the same tools were being used, namely; shared services, the localism agenda and further efficiencies by reducing costs in-house. However, the Conservative

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proposals differed on emphasis. He said that the Group firmly believed that the Administration's emphasis on localism and the savings accruing from this area was wholly unrealistic.

He thanked the Corporate Director: Resources and her team for their dedication and effort in helping to put the strategy together.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor M Hart.

A discussion on the amendment ensued. The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Capital Investments and for Localism that it was always the aim of the Administration to work with Town and Parish Councils which they will continue to do. She said that the authority had developed an amicable working relationship with the Town and Parish Councils and thanked those that had taken part in negotiations so far.

Named votes on the Conservative Group proposals were recorded as follows and the amendment was defeated:

For (12)

Councillors: J Byng, S Chambers, B Dawes, N Desmond, N Gale, I Hardiman, P Harrison, M Hart, K Henderson, L Jones, T Onslow and C Rogers.

Against (18)

Councillors: J Aston, G Ballinger, C Barnett, V Caulfield, A Coleman, R Coleman, H Dyke, P Dyke, C Edginton-White, S Griffiths, A L'Huillier, N Martin, M Rayner, S Rook, D Sheppard, J Thomas, L Whitehouse and P Young.

Abstained (3)

Councillors: S Miah, F Oborski MBE and A Totty.

Councillor Oborski MBE moved a suite of amendments, as set out on pages 51 to 56 of the report, on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group. She outlined the main parts of the proposals. She paid tribute to Councillor H Dyke for her leadership on Localism and Councillor M Rayner for her work on Kidderminster Town Council's localism negotiating team. She said they had done an excellent job. However after all their hard work the Liberal Democrat Group felt that the targets were unobtainable in the timescale of the MTFS, hence the reduced target.

The proposals were seconded by Councillor A Totty.

At 9.47pm Council agreed unanimously to suspend the Council Procedure Rules (Standing Orders) 1.1 (iii) to allow the meeting to continue until 11pm.

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The Leader said that funding for Community Groups from the Wyre Forest Lottery and Localism targets were on track. He said that bids for the Wyre Forest Lottery would be looked at by an all party working group to ensure that they were considered in a fair and equitable way and not used for political purposes. He urged members to vote against the proposals.

Named votes on the Liberal Democrat Group proposals were recorded as follows and the amendment was defeated:

For (4)

Councillors: S Miah, F Oborski MBE, A Totty and L Whitehouse.

Against (16)

Councillors: J Aston, G Ballinger, C Barnett, V Caulfield, A Coleman, R Coleman, H Dyke, P Dyke, C Edginton-White, S Griffiths, A L'Huillier, N Martin, M Rayner, D Sheppard, J Thomas and P Young.

Abstained (13)

Councillors: J Byng, S Chambers, B Dawes, N Desmond, N Gale, I Hardiman, P Harrison, M Hart, K Henderson, L Jones, T Onslow, C Rogers and S Rook.

A robust debate on the substantive proposals took place. A number of members spoke against the proposals as they felt they lacked clarity in certain areas and would be detrimental to the communities that elected members serve.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Capital Investments and for Localism urged members to vote for the budget. She said it had taken a long time to put together and the Administration knew what direction they were going in, and it was a positive one.

In conclusion, the Leader said that the Cabinet were not looking at a plan of reducing staff numbers, they were looking at ways of utilising them better with a view to creating more opportunities to create extra income. That will be the way forward. He added that the budget was deliverable and urged members to vote in favour of it.

A named vote on the substantive budget proposals was recorded as follows and was tied.

For (16)

Councillors: J Aston, G Ballinger, C Barnett, V Caulfield, A Coleman, R Coleman, H Dyke, P Dyke, C Edginton-White, S Griffiths, A L'Huillier, N Martin, M Rayner, D Sheppard, J Thomas and P Young.

Against (16)

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Councillors: J Byng, S Chambers, B Dawes, N Desmond, N Gale, I Hardiman, P Harrison, M Hart, K Henderson, L Jones, S Miah, F Oborski MBE, T Onslow, C Rogers, A Totty and L Whitehouse.

Abstained (1)

Councillor S Rook.

As the vote was tied, the Chairman used his casting vote and voted against the proposals, which were therefore defeated.

Decision: At 10.43pm Council agreed unanimously to adjourn the meeting until 5.30pm on Monday 1st March 2021.

The adjourned meeting resumed remotely at 5.30pm on Monday 1st March 2021.

Present:

Councillors: S Miah (Chairman), J Aston (Vice-Chairman), 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, L Whitehouse and P W M Young.

A moment of silence was observed in memory of former District Councillor Ken Stokes who had sadly passed away that day.

The Chairman said that budget setting was a very important part of what members of the Council did. He said it was important that all members were professional and maintained a high degree of standards, and debate with dignity and respect to one another.

C.72 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

C.73 Declarations of Interests by Members

Councillor T Onslow declared, in respect of agenda item number 15 – Council Tax Setting 2021-2022, that she was the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for West Mercia, and was involved in setting the Council Tax for The Office of the PCC.

C.74 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021-2024

The Council considered an amendment to the recommendation in the report which had been circulated to members prior the meeting.

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The Leader presented the amendment and formally moved it for approval. He said that following a series of meetings with all parties, the Administration were able to put together the proposals. He acknowledged the support from the Labour Group and thanked the Leader of the Group, Councillor S Rook, for her help and said that the Progressive Alliance had taken heed of some of the points the Group had made.

He said that it was important that the Council set a budget that was in the interests of the population of Wyre Forest and urged members to support the amendment.

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

A discussion ensued.

Councillor F Oborski thanked the Leader for the revisions he had made to the budget proposals and said that the Liberal Democrat Group would be supporting them. She said it was important that when the outcome of the Local Plan Review was known, a review by the Local Government Boundary Commission be undertaken to look at the District Council ward boundaries in Wyre Forest to take account of the housing growth, and hoped that the County Council boundaries would also be included in the review.

Councillor M Hart thanked the Leader and Officers for putting forward the revised proposals. He said that the Conservative Group were pleased that there was going to be a management review with a view to it being implemented by April 2022. He acknowledged that the Leader had done enough with the proposals that the Conservative Group would not allow the budget to fail; however it was still poles apart from the Conservative Group's position, and therefore it was felt that the Group could not positively support the proposals.

Councillor S Rook said that she had discussed the management review with the Progressive Alliance and the Chief Executive and had made her views known. She said that this was a vote for the budget and voting on the outcome of the management review was for another time.

A named vote on the alternative budget proposals was recorded as follows and was agreed:

For (21)

Councillors: J Aston, G Ballinger, C Barnett, V Caulfield, A Coleman, R Coleman, H Dyke, P Dyke, C Edginton-White, S Griffiths, A L'Huillier, N Martin, S Miah, F Oborski MBE, M Rayner, S Rook, D Sheppard, J Thomas, A Totty, L Whitehouse and P Young.

Abstained (12)

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Councillors: J Byng, S Chambers, B Dawes, N Desmond, N Gale, I Hardiman, P Harrison, M Hart, K Henderson, L Jones, T Onslow and C Rogers.

There being no further amendments. A named vote on the substantive budget proposals as amended was recorded as follows and was agreed:

For (21)

Councillors: J Aston, G Ballinger, C Barnett, V Caulfield, A Coleman, R Coleman, H Dyke, P Dyke, C Edginton-White, S Griffiths, A L'Huillier, N Martin, S Miah, F Oborski MBE, M Rayner, S Rook, D Sheppard, J Thomas, A Totty, L Whitehouse and P Young.

Abstained (12)

Councillors: J Byng, S Chambers, B Dawes, N Desmond, N Gale, I Hardiman, P Harrison, M Hart, K Henderson, L Jones, T Onslow and C Rogers.

Decision: Council;

1.1 APPROVED the updated Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2021-2024;

1.1.2 APPROVED the revised Cabinet Proposals – taking into account the impact on the Council's Capital and Revenue Budgets for 2021-2024 including:

- a) Approval of a further programme of phased savings for the strategic repositioning of the Council from the Wyre Forest Forward Savings Programme of £0.817m in 2021-22, £1.208m in 2022-23, £1.5m in 2023-24 ongoing after this year;**
- b) Confirmation that the Wyre Forest Forward Savings Programme is expected to reduce management costs as a result of implementing new service delivery models and a holistic review, to be led by the Chief Executive, is planned for implementation by April 2022 at the latest;**
- c) Confirmation that the Council should not seek a review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to reduce the number of Councillors but recognising that a review is likely to be necessary to allow redrawing of ward boundaries to take account of future population growth as a result of the local plan;**
- d) 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.

- e) **Approval of arrangements to withdraw the Community Leadership Fund, with final allocations of £33k being £1000 per Councillor in 2021-22, reduced to £16.5k being £500 per Councillor in 2022-23 and zero thereafter.**
- 1.1.3 APPROVED 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 APPROVED The amended Corporate Plan as set out in Appendix 5, including removal of the priority about affordable housing.**
- 1.1.5 APPROVED the Council's updated Capital Strategy including the following Indicators and limits that have been 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 non- Treasury Prudential Indicators in Appendix 2 of the December Cabinet report now updated for Cabinet Proposal and inclusion of the Future High Streets Funding (FHSF) as set out in Appendix 2/2 of the 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 now updated for Cabinet Proposals and FHSF as set out in Appendix 2/2 of the 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 APPROVED 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 **The Council Tax increase is confirmed as £5 pa and Council:**
- 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 **NOTED 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 **NOTED 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 APPROVED 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.**

C.75 Council Tax Setting 2021-2022

Council considered the formal resolution for setting the Council Tax for 2021-2022. This included the 2.28% increase in the District Council's element of Council Tax, as recommended by Cabinet on 9th February 2021, and the precepts and council tax increases in the elements of Council Tax set by the following bodies: Worcestershire County Council (+2.50%); The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia (+6.66%); Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority (+1.97%).

The Leader formally moved the recommendations for approval. The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Localism seconded the proposals.

Councillor M Hart thanked the Council's Section 151 Officer, Tracey Southall, and her team for all the hard work they had done in respect of the process.

A named vote on the Council Tax resolution was recorded as follows and

was agreed:

For (33)

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

Decision: Council approved the formal Council Tax Resolution 2021-22 at Appendix 1, taking into account information contained in Appendices 2 to 5.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 6.40pm.

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<https://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/53298>