

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY,  
KIDDERMINSTER

22 SEPTEMBER 2021 (6PM)

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**Present:**

Councillors: J Aston (Chairman), P Dyke (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, 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, S Miah, F M Oborski MBE, T L Onslow, M Rayner, C Rogers, D R Sheppard, J W R Thomas, A Totty, L Whitehouse and P W M Young.

**C.39 Prayers**

Prayers were read by Rev Carey Saleh, St Michael and All Angels, Stourport-on-Severn and All Saints, Wilden.

**C.40 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S E N Rook.

**C.41 Declarations of Interests by Members**

No declarations of interest were made.

**C.42 Minutes**

**Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 14th July 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

**C.43 Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

**C.44 Questions**

Eight questions had been submitted in accordance with Standing Order Section 7, 1.8 by members of the Council.

**1. Question from Councillor Fran Oborski MBE to the to the Leader of the Council**

Back in 2020 we were told that Cordwells were in legal negotiations with Vue Cinemas over the development of a multi screen cinema complex on

the former Glades Leisure Centre site. Can the Cabinet Member tell me the current status of this proposed development?

**Answer from the Leader of the Council**

I attended a positive meeting with the cinema operator and the developer in July this year when both reaffirmed their intention to move forward on this project. The covid pandemic has caused the cinema operator to rethink its seating design. With any new cinemas they bring forward there are looking at a new vision of reclining seats with will provide more distance between each customer for obvious reasons to do with covid. They have been looking at revised layouts to accommodate them. They will also be taking the necessary surveys and site investigations in support of a planning application to be submitted hopefully in early spring next year. In the meantime, the developer will continue to work with a cinema operator on the required legal processes which when completed will enable the detailed pre-let conversations to start and take place. There has already been interest from various outlets but this would be commercially sensitive so it would not be proper for me to discuss it in this chamber.

**Supplementary question**

I am very grateful for that answer, I hope that the Leader will be able to a make a public statement as soon as possible because I know there are a lot of people out there in the community wanting to know exactly what is happening.

**Answer**

If I take that as a question Councillor Oborski, yes, obviously I think it is well known that I do not like to raise expectations until I have firm facts in front of me. As soon as we are able, we will make public statements.

**2. Question from Councillor Fran Oborski MBE to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio**

Can the Cabinet Member for Finance tell what is the likely cost to WFDC as an Employer of the Government's proposed 1.25% increase in NI Contributions?

**Answer from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio**

The estimated cost of the Government's National Insurance is expected to be £68,000 in 2022 – 2023. Paragraph 86 of the Government's plan for health and social care says *the Government intends to compensate departments and other public sector employers in England at the spending review and for the increased cost of the levy*. If the Government did not take this step, then the spending power of the public services including the NHS would be reduced. We welcome that commitment and look forward to the Government ensuring that there will be a full reimbursement of the

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additional cost. It would be very disappointing if spending on District

Councils had to be reduced in order to fund the NHS and social care.

#### **Supplementary question**

In view of the fact that those of us above pensionable age, that are not used to paying NI, will have to pay NI if we have any earnings above the NI threshold, can you possibly tell me at what stage the Treasurer's department are likely to be contacting members who are in that advanced age bracket to find out what our earnings are and whether we are going to be liable or not?

#### **Answer**

That is a very fulsome question, and very complex. I do not think that at this moment in time we are able to give you a full and complex answer that you deserve. Therefore, we will give you a written response.

#### **3. Question from Councillor Marcus Hart to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services**

Would the Cabinet Member for Operational Services confirm to this Council that all statutory services provided by the Depot will remain throughout the tenure of the Progressive Alliance?

#### **Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services**

All options with regard to Council services are being looked at to find the best options for this Council moving forward. Councillor Hart well knows the position this Council is in financially and therefore it is right that the Progressive Alliance explore all options that are out there. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy commits us to examine shared service options with our colleagues in Redditch and Bromsgrove this review is underway. On that basis, I cannot confirm that services will remain unchanged.

#### **Supplementary question**

Would you agree with me that any suggestion that this Council and the Progressive Alliance would not fulfil its statutory duties for example to pick up the litter under section 89 of the Environmental Protection Act would be an utter disgrace and will he confirm to me that moving forward the length and breadth of this district litter in particular will continue to be a statutory function of this Council and they will not seek to obviate it to anybody?

#### **Answer**

Hopefully, litter is one of the options that will remain with this Council moving forward.

#### **4. Question from Councillor Marcus Hart to the Cabinet Member for**

**Operational Services**

Would the Cabinet Member for Operational Services confirm to this Council what the catering offer for staff, tenants, visitors, hirers and members will be moving forward now we begin to return to Wyre Forest House?

**Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services**

As Council knows, prior to the pandemic café services was provided by a tenant organisation, Aspen Vintage Events. Their tenancy agreement started in September 2019 and runs until September 2024. At the start of the pandemic Aspens closed their business operations and café services within Wyre Forest House. They have advised us they will not be trading or reopening the café even after ceasing of lockdown restrictions. Their tenancy agreement continues, and they are still paying rent for the area. All the kitchen areas have remained available for staff and tenants to use during the pandemic for bringing their own consumables for drinks and food preparation, a water drinking machine is also available in reception.

As the café services are no longer available for refreshments for events in the public meeting rooms from 1st September users and hirers are able to make their own catering arrangements for their meetings and events. We have also asked that the mobile catering vans that are around the area, stop off each day outside Wyre Forest House as they come onto the Finepoint Way site. As people know they offer freshly made sandwiches and snacks.

**Supplementary question**

Would you therefore clarify for this Council whether when a hirer books this venue we put a catering offer inclusive or effectively in addition to the hiring cost and therefore that is something that we facilitate and secondly are you now confirming to this Council that effectively the catering offer that once was in this building will not be the same moving forwards?

**Answer**

Yes, the catering offer as it stands at the moment will not be the same moving forward. As we move forward to look at the options that are available for this building. Obviously we will consider what future catering options will remain and as I did say in my answer areas are available for hirers and users to bring and make good their own catering arrangements for events as and when they hire this building.

**5. Question from Councillor Marcus Hart to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio**

Would the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio advise this Council on the long term future of the Hub and its operating model?

**Answer from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio**

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As members know the Hub is based now in Green Street for which there are no plans to change. I will summarise the operating arrangements in the post covid world. The Hub staff now work based around a hybrid model of office and home working. The Hub reception is staffed on a rota basis where, when not on reception duty, the Customer Service Advisers work from home answering the telephone and e-mails.

The Hub is promoting an appointment system in order to manage the customer demand. Anyone needing urgent advice or support can be seen by a Customer Service Adviser between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday, although an appointment is preferred when possible. Housing Officers are also on site at all times and see those in need of emergency housing as required.

### **Supplementary question**

Would you be so kind as to agree with me, given the importance that this Council is open and transparent and given your previous comments about being open and accessible to the public, that it is imperative that the Hub is open to all members of the public without the need for an appointment? Could you also advise Council given you said that it's open to urgent advice for people who turn up what the definition of urgent advice is and who determines whether it's urgent or not?

### **Answer**

I am really pleased you asked these questions for clarification on what I said. Firstly, this is a hybrid model: there are staff at the Hub from Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm. There are two main ways of getting access to the Hub one is by an appointment system. Some people prefer appointments because they can access them so there are staff there to answer and promote an appointment system. There are also staff there which will answer anybody's questions: whoever turns up, whether it is an emergency or otherwise, they are there to answer the questions. The people who are in that part of the Hub will actually have to sit and queue and take their turn, but others who are going through an appointment system will get their appointment on a specified time at a specified date to suit them. People who need to urgently see people - like somebody who's been evicted in the morning - they can easily turn up straight away at the Hub. They will be seen and they will be sorted out and given appropriate housing accommodation. I hope that has clarified the situation for you.

### **6. Question from Councillor Nathan Desmond to the Leader of the Council**

Would the Leader of the Council update Council on the latest position on the cinema proposal for Lionfields at the Former Glades Leisure Centre site?

As Councillor Oborski had previously asked a similar question, Councillor Desmond moved to his supplementary question.

**Supplementary question**

I am very grateful for the Leader's positive reply to Councillor Oborski's question. Would the Leader of the Council commit to attend a future meeting of scrutiny, obviously with the Chairman's indulgence, to brief members on this very important regeneration topic in exempt if possible?

**Answer**

Yes, Councillor Desmond I do not have a problem with that. I would wish to accumulate some more information before I did that because obviously scrutiny would want to know more details, but in agreement with the Chairman of scrutiny, I do not see a problem with that at all.

**7. Question from Councillor Ian Hardiman to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services**

Would the Cabinet Member for Operational Services update this Council on progress on estate verge grass cutting since the July meeting of Full Council and his subsequent written briefing note?

**Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services**

You will recall that at the time I reported that the team have been affected by a couple of key issues in terms of grass cutting. The main issue was the weather and the other was staffing. A very wet May, followed by damp spells in June and July, produced the perfect conditions for the prolific grass growing and the teams were struggling to catch up. I understand that many other councils' grass cutting crews suffered the same issues that we encountered with the grass growing beyond their teams' ability to catch up and keep on top of it. The whole team at the Depot were also dealing with the Covid "ping-demic" episode, which affected the availability of our staff.

I am pleased to announce that, despite these specific issues, this service along with many other key front line functions has continued to be delivered by our dedicated and hardworking team, even if this has meant that some staff had to be moved around. Again, we hear of many council services elsewhere that have been suspended during this difficult time so we should congratulate our own teams for being committed and flexible in doing the wonderful job they have done.

**Supplementary question**

There is no criticism of our staff of course. We were very impressed with all the efforts they have made during the pandemic. However, can the Cabinet Member please explain why when the County Council is increasing its funding for grass cutting for the district each year this Council is reducing its spend on this important matter?

**Answer**

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Yes, the County Council is increasing their spend but we have to look at it from a practical point of view. How much should we spend ourselves on getting this service done when the majority of the costs are really down to the County Council? It is a function of the County Council that we do on their behalf so, to me, the County Council should be contributing much more than they do in order to for us to carry out this important function.

#### **8. Question from Councillor Chris Rogers to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Wellbeing and Democratic Services**

Would the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Wellbeing and Democratic Services advise this Council when the first electric vehicle charging point will be installed in a WFDC owned pay and display car park?

#### **Answer from the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Wellbeing and Democratic Services**

As a member of the Green Advisory Panel you will have received the report for the meeting on the 24th of September which builds on the earlier consultancy study. On the 24th it is hoped that the Panel will formulate its recommendations and hopefully will recommend that the financial modelling be finalised and a business case for the investment at several of our car parks come for approval by Cabinet at some point.

#### **Supplementary question**

Would the Cabinet Member not agree with me that a major incentive to owning an electric car is being able to charge it, not just at home but where you work and where you shop, and should we not be moving as quickly as possible to achieve this and offer an incentive for people to buy electric vehicles as other councils have done?

#### **Answer**

I would agree with you that the way forward is electric vehicles. However you will understand as an experienced councillor that I am unable to give you a precise date because of the modelling, the business case, the procurement and all that it involves. So, apologies for not being able to give you a date but it is moving forward.

#### **C.45 Chairman's Communications**

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

#### **C.46 Leader of the Council Announcements**

The Leader of the Council referred members to her tabled report.

#### **C.47 Amendments to Council Procedure Rules**

Council received a report from the Chief Executive to consider

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amendments to the Council Procedure Rules (Standing Orders) in Part 7 of the Council's Constitution.

The Leader presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval. The proposals were seconded by the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Safety.

Councillor M Hart moved an amendment to the proposals to set up a cross party member working group consisting of one member from each political group, to be chaired by the Chairman of the Council to consider further the proposals as set out in Appendix 1. He proposed the working group concludes its work and makes its recommendations by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 to inform a Full Council report for adoption at the AGM in May 2022.

Councillor F Oborski MBE seconded the proposals and outlined her reasons for supporting the amendment.

A robust debate on the amendment to the motion ensued. Upon a show of hands, the vote on the amendment was tied.

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

A discussion on the substantive motion took place. Upon a show of hands, the vote on the substantive motion was tied.

As the vote was tied, the Chairman used his casting vote and voted in favour of the substantive motion, which was therefore carried.

**Decision: Council AGREED the amendments set out in Appendix 1 of the report.**

At 7.40pm the meeting was adjourned for a short comfort break, the meeting resumed at 7.48pm.

#### **C.48 Motions Submitted under Standing Orders**

Two motions have been received in accordance with Standing Orders (Section 7, 4.1).

##### **1. Notice of Motion from the Conservative Group**

*This Council fully supports the Green Agenda and is committed to ensuring that sustainability is at the heart of our decision making.*

*Furthermore, this Council fully endorses the need for a Solar Farm on land owned by WFDC as proposed by the Conservative Group in February 2020 and the need for electric charging points in our pay and display car parks.*

*This Council is concerned about the delay in making real progress on these really important issues for our communities and calls upon The Leader of*



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*the Council to provide a full formal update to this Council urgently.*

Councillor C Rogers presented the motion on behalf of the Conservative Group. The motion was seconded by Councillor I Hardiman.

Councillor Rogers outlined the reasons for the motion and a robust debate ensued.

**Decision: Upon a show of hands the motion was defeated.**

#### **2. Notice of Motion from Councillor S Miah on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group**

Councillor S Miah presented a motion on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group. The motion was seconded by Councillor F Oborski MBE.

Councillor Miah outlined the reasons for the motion and an open and thorough discussion ensued. Several members spoke in agreement with the motion and shared their personal experiences of dealing with mental ill health issues.

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

Decision: The notice of motion be agreed:

This council notes:

- 1 in 4 adults and one child in six will experience a mental health problem in any year.
- Mental ill health costs some £119 billion each year in England alone.
- People with a severe mental illness die up to 20 years younger than average in the UK.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has put extra strain on people's mental health, and this is likely to last for some time after.

This council believes:

- As a local authority we have a crucial role to play in improving the mental health of everyone in our community and tackling some of the widest and most entrenched inequalities in health.
- Mental health should be a priority across all the local authority's areas of responsibility.
- All councillors, whether members of the Executive or Scrutiny and in our community and casework roles, can play a positive role in championing mental health on an individual and strategic basis.

This council resolves:

- To sign the Local Authorities' Mental Health Challenge run by Centre for Mental Health.
- We commit to appoint an elected member as 'mental health champion' across the council.

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- We will support the member champion to enable them to take on this role.

Subject to availability of resources and with the expectation that the council will focus on services within its statutory duties and discretionary powers, the council will also:

- Support positive mental health in our community, including in local schools, neighbourhoods and workplaces.
- Work to reduce inequalities in mental health in our community.
- Work with local partners to offer effective support for people with mental health needs.
- Tackle discrimination on the grounds of mental health in our community.
- Proactively listen to people of all ages and backgrounds about what they need for better mental health.

#### **C.49 Urgent Motions submitted under Standing Orders**

There were no urgent motions.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 9.15pm.

The full meeting is available for viewing on the Council's website <https://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/your-council/councillors-committees-and-meetings/council-meetings/>