

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER

9 NOVEMBER 2021 (6PM)

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**Present:**

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

**Observers:**

Councillors: N J Desmond, C Edginton-White, I Hardiman, M J Hart and F M Oborski MBE.

**CAB.46 Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

**CAB.47 Declarations of Interests by Members**

No declarations of interest were made.

**CAB.48 Minutes**

**Decision: The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 13 October 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

**CAB.49 Call Ins**

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

**CAB.50 Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

There were no items requiring urgent attention.

**CAB.51 Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

**CAB.52 Business case for the use of Electric Vehicle Chargepoints (EVC) on Council owned car parks**

A report was considered from the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity and Place to agree the final business case for Electric Vehicle Chargepoints (EVC) on Council owned car parks including detailed financial modelling undertaken by the Financial Services Manager and to proceed to implementation.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic

Services gave a detailed presentation of the report. She thanked the Chairman and members of the Overview and Scrutiny for their robust scrutiny of the proposals. The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services confirmed that the cross party Green Advisory Panel had considered all of the delivery models as part of their work programme, and were unanimous in their support for the operator model.

She also thanked the members of the Green Advisory Panel and the Head of Strategic Growth and her team for their hard work, and for the time and effort they had put in to get to this point.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services formally moved the recommendations for approval, which were seconded by the Cabinet Member for Operational Services.

**Decision: Having had regard to the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from its meeting on 4 November 2021, Cabinet:**

- 1.1 Approved the business case at Appendix One;**
- 1.2 supported the need for procurement exercises (a) to select a suitable contractor for the installation of the electric vehicle chargepoints and the contestable elements of the grid connection work (b) to select a suitable contractor for operating the installed electric vehicle charge points, including in both cases soft market testing to help inform likely costs and the specification if required;**
- 1.3 delegated authority to the Head of Community and Environment Services:**
  - 1.3.1 to advertise the amendment to the Wyre Forest District Council's Parking Places (Off-Street Parking Places) Order 2020 ("Parking Places Order") to reflect the introduction of charging points in suitable parking spaces within car parks already included in the Parking Places Order; to incorporate its car parks at Green Street and Wyre Forest House in the Order (including use of suitable spaces for electric vehicle charging points); and, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Operational Services, to consider operational requirements for the usage of the electric vehicle charging spaces, including duration of stay and car parking charges which will form part of the proposed amendments to the Parking Places Order;**
  - 1.3.2 in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Operational Services to consider any objections made as a result of the advertisement and, following such consideration, to decide whether the Parking Places Order should be amended; and**
- 1.4 delegated to the Solicitor to the Council authority to make all of the agreed changes to the Parking Places Order.**

**Cabinet RECOMMEND to Council that:**

- 1.5 The Capital Programme is amended accordingly to accommodate the purchase and installation of Electric Vehicle Charging points together with the requisite revisions to the revenue budget as set out in Appendix 3 of the report.**

**CAB.53 Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Review**

A report was considered from the Revenues, Benefits & Customer Services Manager which updated Cabinet on the service review of the Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services teams including the proposed estimated reduction in ongoing expenditure.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval. She thanked the Revenues, Benefits & Customer Services Manager and her team for all the hard work that had gone into the review which proposed an estimated reduction in ongoing expenditure of circa £260,000 in a full year starting from April 2022.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio explained that, as there were no timely holistic shared service opportunities, a consultation paper was issued on 23 September setting out proposals for an internal savings option for the whole service. She added that the proposals suggested deletion of 4 posts across the service. Sufficient expressions of interest in voluntary redundancy were received to allow the proposals to proceed with no compulsory redundancies.

She further explained that the Chief Executive as Head of Paid Service can agree restructures. However Council approval is required for approval of severance costs in two cases, that exceed £100,000.

In conclusion she said that the proposals made a significant and very welcome contribution towards closing the Council's Funding Gap whilst retaining the service provision in-house and using ICT and service redesign to minimise the impact on service delivery.

The Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Safety seconded the recommendations. The Leader echoed the thanks given to the Revenues, Benefits & Customer Services Manager and her team for all their hard work and said that the proposal was very much appreciated.

**Decision: Cabinet NOTED AND ENDORSED:**

- 1.1 The service review proposals for the Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services teams, including the welcome resultant annual savings that will be reflected in the MTFs report in December.**

**Cabinet RECOMMEND to Council:**

**1.2 Approval of the severance costs in two cases that exceed £100,000.**

**CAB.54 Financial and Strategic Policy Context for the Medium Term Financial Strategy**

A report was considered from the Chief Executive on the financial and policy context that will shape the medium term financial strategy (MTFS) for 2022-2025.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval. She was pleased to report that the proposals included a recommendation to Council to amend the capital programme to reflect the excellent news of the grant from the levelling up fund. She paid tribute to the Head of Economic Development & Regeneration - North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration, and his team for all the hard work involved in submitting the successful bid. She added that the funding was in addition to the £20m secured last December from the Future High Streets Fund. She said it was very promising and positive to see such levels of investment, which would address the district's infrastructure needs and future vitality in the principal town centre.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio explained that the report provided a summary of the main strategic and financial issues that provide the context for the MTFS which will be considered by Cabinet on 21 December. However, there were a number of aspects that were still unknown such as; what the provisional local government settlement for 2022/23 will be; will the settlement be enough to cover known pressures such as the 1.25% increase in National Insurance; will it provide any contribution at all to close with funding gap; the need to know what is happening to the new homes bonus; and when there might be a business rates reset, and when a new funding formula might be introduced.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio added that even in advance of the provisional statement the council's financial position was better than a year ago in respects of 2022/23 and the level of reserves that the council might have by 2025. However, unfortunately the council's £2m financial gap remained and the authority still had to make significant reductions in costs which will mean further changes to how services are secured for the future.

She added that the council will become a smaller organisation; doing less itself by transferring assets and services to other organisations; introducing shared services where possible and undertaking internal reviews where not possible. She said it was unavoidable that there will be fewer Wyre Forest District Council staff, and therefore it was important for residents and members to be aware and reflect on the fact that their expectations of services will be changed. She said that the authority had reached the point where it had to reduce discretionary areas of activity, and the Cabinet would continue to remove some of the minor discretionary services that the council can no longer afford to support.

In conclusion the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio said the financial situation of the council was as a result of over 10 years of austerity for local government from the Westminster government. Whilst the council choose what changes are made locally, change is unavoidable. The council has to continue on a trajectory of becoming smaller and doing less. However the ultimate responsibility for why we have to do things, that members will no doubt say are unpalatable, rests squarely with central government. She added that the choices the authority are left with may be uncomfortable, but to do nothing would not be appropriate.

The Leader seconded the proposals.

**Decision: Cabinet AGREED:**

- 1.1 The suggested approach to the medium term financial strategy set out in section 4 of the report, and that this should now be the subject of consultation prior to the Cabinet taking final decisions on its proposals for the strategy at its meeting in December.**

**Cabinet RECOMMEND to Council that:**

- 1.2 It amends the capital programme to include the Levelling Up Fund projects, funded by Government grant of £17.9m.**

**CAB.55 Write off of Amounts Outstanding**

A report was considered from the Corporate Director: Resources to enable the Cabinet to give consideration to writing off the sum of £20,824.21 in respect of debts that cannot be collected.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio presented the report and formally moved the recommendation for approval.

She explained that as billing authority the Council was responsible for the collection of Business Rates (National Non-Domestic Rates or NNDR) c£30m pa and for the recovery of any related debt in the event of non-payment. She said every effort had been made to pursue the debt proposed for write-off following the policies and procedures of the Council. She added that debt recovery can be a prolonged exercise and before proposals for write-off are brought to members every avenue available to aid recovery is explored.

The Leader seconded the recommendation.

**Decision: Cabinet DECIDED that the total of £20,824.21 as detailed in the Appendix to the report, be written off, for National Non-Domestic Rates.**

**CAB.56 Exclusion of Press and Public**

**Decision: "Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of "exempt information" as defined in paragraphs**

**of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.**

**CAB.57 Agenda Item 7.1 - Electric Vehicle Charging Points**

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services presented the confidential appendices to the report.

Having considered the appendices, the Cabinet re-affirmed their decision made in the open session of the meeting.

**CAB.58 Agenda Item 8.1 - Proposals for Revenues, Benefits, Customer Services and Business Support Review**

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services presented the confidential appendix to the report.

Having considered the appendix, the Cabinet re-affirmed their decision made in the open session of the meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 7.38pm.