

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY,
KIDDERMINSTER**

21 SEPTEMBER 2022 (6PM)

Present:

Councillors: P Dyke (Chairman), C Edginton-White (Vice-Chairman), J Aston, G W Ballinger, C J Barnett, B Brookes, J F Byng, V Caulfield, S J Chambers, A Coleman, R H Coleman, B S Dawes, N J Desmond, H E Dyke, N Gale, I Hardiman, P Harrison, M J Hart, K Henderson, L J Jones, N Martin, S Miah, F M Oborski MBE, T L Onslow, M Rayner, C Rogers, S E N Rook, D Ross, D R Sheppard, J W R Thomas, A Totty, L Whitehouse and P W M Young.

C.34 Prayers

Prayers were said by Rev David Hildred, Team Rector, Kidderminster East.

C.35 Apologies for Absence

The Chairman advised that Councillor S Chambers would be late attending the meeting.

C.36 Tributes to Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Second

Council observed a few moments' silence for Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Second; and Honorary Alderman Pauline Hayward who had sadly died since the last Council meeting.

Tributes were given by the Chairman of the Council, the Leader of the Council, and the Leaders of the Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour Groups.

The Chairman said that there was great sorrow at the passing of the Queen and it was a difficult time for us all. He wished the new King all the very best for the future and said that he will do the Country proud.

The Chairman passed his condolences onto the friends and family of Honorary Alderman Hayward

The Leader said that Her Late Majesty, and the late Prince Phillip had set an outstanding example of public service. Her Late Majesty had reigned with dignity and decency throughout her 70 years on the throne. She said it was impossible to find anything new to say at this point as there had been such an outpouring of love and respect; so she would like to say a simple

Agenda Item No. 4

thank you on behalf of the residents of Wyre Forest for the years of service, devotion and dedication that she had given to the Country and its people. The Leader offered the Royal Family her condolences at this very sad time.

On behalf of the Conservative Group, Councillor M Hart paid tribute to the late Councillor Pauline Hayward. He said that she had led a life of distinction and service within the district and sent his best wishes to her family.

Councillor Hart thanked Her Late Majesty most sincerely for a lifetime of dedicated service. He said that she reigned with dignity and distinction and touched the lives of millions of people across the Country, Commonwealth, and indeed the world. He said she was a shining example of leadership.

On behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group, Councillor F Oborski MBE thanked Her Late Majesty for 70 years of impeccable service and total loyalty to the Country and people across the world. She said that she hoped she would rest in peace and rise in glory.

Councillor S Chambers joined the meeting at 6.14pm.

On behalf of the Labour Group, Councillor L Whitehouse thanked Her Late Majesty for dedicating her life to serve us all and may she rest in eternal peace.

C.37 Declarations of Interests by Members

No declarations of interest were made.

C.38 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

C.39 Public Participation

There was no public participation.

C.40 Chairman's Communications

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

C.41 Leader of the Council Announcements

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

C.42 Review of Polling Places in the Wyre Forest District

Council considered a report from the Returning Officer & Chief Executive that advised Council of the need to conduct a review of two designated polling places in the Wyre Forest District.

Agenda Item No. 4

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

The Cabinet Member drew members' attention to a typographical error in the report in that the town centre electors were part of BHS-4 and the correct polling district would be used in the consultation. She explained that the Gainsborough Hotel and Stourport Workmen's club were no longer available, and the report outlined the alternatives that would be the subject of consultation.

She added that it was important that any alternative polling place was fully accessible for disabled people and that was why St John's church was not considered suitable, in particular because there was no nearby parking.

In conclusion she said that Council would have the opportunity at its December meeting to consider the outcome of the consultation process and take decisions in light of views from electors, representatives of disabled people and others.

The Leader seconded the proposals.

Upon a vote, the proposals were agreed.

Decision: Council NOTED that:

- 1.1 A review will be undertaken of polling places for polling districts BHS-4 and BHS-5 and AKR-SC to take effect from 1 January 2023;**
- 1.2 A report on the review and decision on changes will be required at the Council's meeting in December.**

C.43 Grading structure and pay policy statement: recruitment and retention of staff

Council received a report from the Chief Executive to consider mitigating actions in response to the corporate risk on "Organisational capacity to deliver - unable to maintain skilled, balanced and motivated workforce".

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

The Cabinet Member explained that in September 2019 Council resolved to return to the national pay agreements for determining annual increases in pay with effect from April 2021. Prior to this there were several years of local pay arrangements. She added that recently the authority was experiencing an increase in staff resignations compared to previous years; this included specialist and unique roles within the Council such as the Planning Manager who had 21 years of experience and knowledge.

Agenda Item No. 4

The Cabinet Member said that there was a growing concern that if the trend continued the authority would lose excessive amounts of corporate knowledge and expertise; which potentially could increase the corporate risk and damage our ability to deliver the range of services that local residents and businesses value.

She added that the local pay arrangements achieved their objective: they reduced costs for the council and saved over £1m. She said the savings had been banked in past years and would not be lost because of the proposals in the report. However, they also meant that the council valued, and continued to value, its staff less highly than other councils.

The Cabinet Member said it was important to act now in respect of this corporate risk. She acknowledged that it was not guaranteed to solve or reduce the problem. However, if the authority did nothing, there would be no change. The risk of current problems with recruitment and retention would continue and potentially get worse.

In conclusion, she asked Council to support the case for action now to mitigate the risk. She said that it should do so in a way that treats all staff equally and show that the Council values its staff and the excellent work that they do.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Safety seconded the proposals.

A robust debate ensued. Several members spoke against the proposals and outlined their reasons for being unable to support the recommendations. A member expressed concern about the figures provided by West Midlands Employers as set out in paragraph 3.5 of the report and said that their group would support the proposals put forward by the Progressive Alliance.

Upon a vote, the proposals were agreed.

Decision: Council:

- 1.1 CONFIRMED that pay points for all staff should be increased by 5% with effect from 1 October 2022;**
- 1.2 ADOPTED the revised pay policy statement in Appendix 1 of the report.**

C.44 Policy And Budget Framework

- a. Recommendation from the Ethics and Standards Committee – 8 September 2022**
 - Amended Member Code of Conduct**

The Chairman of the Committee, Councillor C Edginton-White presented

Agenda Item No. 4

the recommendations and formally moved them for approval. Councillor M Hart seconded the proposal.

Upon a vote, the proposal was agreed.

Decision: Council AGREED to adopt the national Local Government Association (LGA) Model Councillor Code of Conduct 2020. Adoption of the national code to be implemented with training following the May 2023 elections.

C.45

Questions

1. Question to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services from Councillor A Totty

Can the Cabinet member tell me what actions, if any, is this Council taking to introduce food waste collection from households?

Answer from Cabinet Member for Operational Services

Wyre Forest District Council is working across Worcestershire, with other councils, to prepare for the implementation of food waste collections as set out in the latest Environment Act. We are not at the moment taking steps to select a preferred option because of the expense that needs to be incurred for the vehicles, the equipment and staffing. We are waiting on the government to confirm the timetable for the implementation and the funding to cover these extra costs. At the moment there has been silence from DEFRA for several months now. So, I am afraid they are dragging their heels a bit but as soon as we know more, I am assured we will be getting on with it.

Supplementary question

Would the Cabinet Member please keep the Council informed as you find out what is happening?

Answer

Yes, I am happy to do that.

2. Question to the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Localism from Councillor M Hart

Could the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic, Regeneration and Localism advise this Council, when we are going to see the Bridge Street car park redeveloped?

Answer from Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Localism

I am happy to report to Council that funding has recently been allocated for a feasibility study to produce development proposals and these proposals will be considered by Cabinet in due course.

Supplementary question

Given that this was a promise by certain candidates pre-May 2019 and given that when the Progressive Alliance took control of this Council in 2019 would she agree with me that, notwithstanding the feasibility study,

Agenda Item No. 4

by the time of next May and their four year term is ended, we need to see a development on this site?

Answer

I cannot be responsible for what candidates may or may not have said before the last elections and I would agree with you that this site does need to have a development of some description in the very near future and we will be working hard to do so but I won't be tied down to dates because it would be wrong of me to do that at this point .

3. Question to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio from Councillor L Jones

Could the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio confirm whether or not he thinks that the WFDC main switchboard automated message is acceptable in its new format, given that it is difficult to understand and follow as a result of the numerous breaks in the speech pattern?

Answer from Leader of the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio

We have had text to speech messages in use since April 2020 and so it is not a new format. This system is much more efficient than having to take up officer time to record the messages every time we need to adapt our messages quickly to meet our customer demands. We have, and have had, significant number of calls that were not a District Council function. People would have to wait in a queue just to be told they had to call another number. Hence, the long message played to all callers directing people to the correct organisation at the onset. We are moving to a different, new telephone phone system in November, which will have new text to speech system, too, and is far more efficient so next month we are hoping that this will be in place and will alleviate any stutters or differences. I would like to take this opportunity to mention that, since it has been installed over 2 years ago, we have had over 64,000 calls and we have received no complaints.

4. Question to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services from Councillor B Brookes

Given the ongoing issues with the quality of street cleansing and litter bin emptying previously raised would the Cabinet Member for Operational Services care to join myself and one of my fellow ward colleagues Cllr. David Ross for a meeting on site in the ward to discuss these issues so he can see for himself some of the problems?

Answer from Cabinet Member for Operational Services

I have recently visited your ward and note that there have been no concerns raised through the Council's formal reporting procedures about excessive quantities of litter in the ward, plus the fact that your fellow ward colleague and Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Ballinger, has raised no concerns with me over this issue, I will politely decline your invitation.

Supplementary question

I am very disappointed that Councillor Thomas is not joining myself and

Agenda Item No. 4

Councillor Ross on our tours of the ward. Would the Cabinet Member also like to arrange further meetings with my fellow Conservative colleagues to look at the dreadful state in which their wards are also in, as it seems that only Conservative Councillors are able to see the neglect and awful condition that this district is in, and we are the only ones trying to do something about it?

Answer

As I said, I do go around all these wards. At present, once a week I visit many of the wards in the district and if you do not believe me, you may want to go down to the depot and see me there either on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. I am down there, and I do go out with officers to look at the problems within the area. So, as I said, no, I do not see that there is a reason for me meeting with ward councillors.

5. Question to the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Localism from Councillor J Byng

Since the Progressive Alliance took control of WFDC in 2019, could the Leader of the Council, who has responsibility for Localism, tell this Council what level of savings have been made by asset transfers and savings, broken down specifically and for the years 2019-2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022?

Answer from Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Localism

The savings achieved for the 3 years are as follows:

2019-2020 Zero, because in that year we have not set ourselves a target because we were at the start of negotiations.

2020-2021 £74,000, increasing to £155,000 in 2021-2022.

If Councillor Byng would like, I can ensure that he gets sent a table with those figures in.

Supplementary question

Are the savings to date on forecast, or better or worse than forecast?

Answer

Several factors mean not having achieved a higher level of savings such as we have been trying for some time to work with Kidderminster Town Council on the transfer of 3 parks and for various reasons we have not been able to progress them at the speed we would like to. I can say that we are moving quite quickly now and hope to have some success there. So, we have hit hitches along the way, as I am sure you will be aware, but we keep working at it and aim to be successful and reach our targets as soon as and when possible.

6. Question to the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Safety from Councillor N Desmond

Following Full Council's approval last December for electric vehicle

Agenda Item No. 4

charging points across Wyre Forest, could the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Safety update me on what has happened on this issue over the last 9 months and when can we expect the first electrical charging point to be fully operational by?

Answer from Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Safety

Councillor Desmond needs to read the Overview and Scrutiny committee papers that he had just less than 3 weeks ago. I have got a copy of that document from the meeting on 1 September when the following information was given in the report:

Electric Vehicle Charging feasibility work completed and capital funding agreed. Procurement process underway, the Energy Savings Trust have been engaged to support and to assist with future funding opportunities, and we have had a meeting with them. So, it is in progress and installation is expected in the autumn and winter 2022.

Supplementary question

Can the Cabinet Member explain what impact the sharp rise in energy costs and general material and building costs over the last 9 months has had on the business model and is delivery still within budget, please?

Answer

I have set out the schedule and that is the schedule. If you want an update on that, we will give you that separately but that is the timetable that was agreed and was put to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

7. Question to the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Safety from Councillor I Hardiman

Can the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Safety please provide an update on whether this Council is still considering establishing a Solar Farm on land owned by the Council?

Answer from Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Safety

The answer is similar to my previous answer. Councillor Hardiman was an observer at the Scrutiny Committee on 1 September when the following information was given in one of the reports:

Item 3, renewable energy generation on Council land –feasibility work funding agreed and consultants been procured to complete this work. Business case to be taken through the formal decision-making process during the winter, and formal report expected during the winter 2022.

Supplementary question

Given that the Conservative group raised the subject, indeed tabled a motion on this subject in September 2019, does the Cabinet Member agree that findings and a conclusion are taking far too long for this Council?

Answer

Agenda Item No. 4

We would have liked it faster but I cannot speculate on the content of the consultant's report. When that work is completed it will be shared with all members of council. Councillor Hardiman has just got to be patient and wait for it like the rest of us. It would have been better if it had been quicker.

8. Question to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services from Councillor S Miah

Given that some placements under the Government's Homes for Ukraine Scheme have already come to an end and more may do so as the initial 6 month commitment by hosts is reached, what steps is WFDC taking to ensure that Ukrainian refugees whose placement cannot continue are able to find either new hosts or residential tenancies locally?

Answer from Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services

All of our Ukrainians are contacted at the 4.5 month stage of their stay by our housing team and it is there that we try to establish their intent and their needs going forward and the intent and the needs of the host going forward. We are currently undertaking DBS and other checks of the hosts who would like to host in the future after this current stage and we have already selected 10 hosts. I believe that you were given the figure of 3 Ukrainian families but actually that is now one Ukrainian family that wish to continue.

Supplementary question

I am sure you will agree that our housing team have done some fantastic work and I am sure you will also agree with me that our hosts have been a God-send to those people who have been affected by the Ukrainian war.

What steps are being taken, or will be taken, to see if current hosts will extend their hosting in the event that some will not be rehoused? What impact will that have on the local housing needs and how will that be addressed and what assistance will be given to those looking to get into private rented accommodation?

Answer

The hosts are being contacted at the moment, just like the families so it is my understanding that our excellent housing team is currently in contact with those hosts. We already have 10 hosts so with 10 hosts and only one Ukrainian family seeking refuge, it is my understanding that there will be no major issues. ,

9. Question to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services from Councillor M Hart

Could the Cabinet Member for Operational Services advise this Council whether he is satisfied with the level of street cleansing that is taking place on our estates throughout the District?

Answer from Cabinet Member for Operational Services

Yes, I am satisfied.

Supplementary question

Agenda Item No. 4

Would he respectfully reconsider the very reasonable request by our Conservative colleague, Councillor Brookes, when he invited him to join us as Conservative members in our respective wards because why is he so fearful because we are all so friendly; we will show him around so will he reconsider and when he drives around on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, across this district, could he confirm whether he has his eyes open or shut?

Answer

I can assure you that when I drive around, I do drive around with my eyes open. If I drive with my eyes closed, I will be heading for a big accident and I can assure you I am not going to do that.

C.46 Motions Submitted under Standing Orders

Three motions had been submitted in accordance with standing orders.

1. Notice of Motion from the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Groups.

Councillor M Hart presented the motion, which was seconded by Councillor F Oborski MBE.

Councillor Hart outlined the reasons for the motion. A debate ensued and a number of members spoke in favour of the motion. The Leader said that in the spirit of working together, the Progressive Alliance would support the motion and the Cabinet would consider the request and report back to Council with their conclusions.

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

Decision: The following motion from the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Groups be agreed:

This Council values the Community Leadership Fund that councillors are allocated in order to spend on good causes, community groups and organisations within their ward.

This Council agrees that this funding provides much needed pump priming to these groups and organisations, especially in the current financial situation and that this is an important resource in assisting councillors to be community champions.

Following the decision taken at Full Council on 23rd February, 2022 as part of the budget setting process and medium term financial strategy, to reduce the Community Leadership Fund allocation from £1,000 to £500 per councillor, this Council calls upon the Cabinet to urgently re-consider this matter and report back to the next meeting of Full Council, working with the Solicitor to the Council and Head of Resources, to consider taking all necessary steps to reinstate the fund per member from £500 to £1,000 as soon as is practicable, having satisfied the necessary legislative and regulatory

requirements, recognising that this will have in year revenue implications of £16,500.

At 7.50pm the meeting was adjourned for a short comfort break and resumed at 8pm.

2. Notice of Motion from the Liberal Democrat Group

Councillor S Miah presented and outlined the reasons for the motion. The motion was seconded by Councillor F Oborski MBE.

Councillor M Hart tabled an amendment to the motion on behalf of the Conservative Group. He outlined the reasons for the amendment which was seconded by Councillor I Hardiman.

A debate on the amendment ensued. A number of members spoke in favour of the amendment and urged Council to support it.

Several members spoke against the amendment. Councillor Miah outlined the reasons why he was unable to support the amendment and urged members to vote against it.

A vote on the amendment to the motion was taken. Upon a show of hands, the amendment was defeated.

A vote upon the substantive motion was taken and agreed.

Decision: The following motion from the Liberal Democrat Group be agreed:

This Council recognises we are in the middle of the worst cost of living crisis for 50 years. Inflation is forecast to hit 18% next year and spiralling energy costs are leaving many people in Wyre Forest struggling to pay their household bills.

Council notes the disastrous impact this year's increases in the energy price cap has had on local people:

- On 1 April 2022, Ofgem increased the energy price cap by 54 per cent. This has increased the average energy bill by £693 a year.
- In October the energy price cap is due to rise again – increasing average energy bills by over £1900 a year.

Council notes the decision taken in June 2022 to impose a Windfall Tax on the profits of giant oil and gas companies. This will be used to fund a £400 reduction in energy bills in late 2022 / early 2023 – a policy first raised by Liberal Democrat leader Sir Ed Davey.

Council further notes Lib Dem leader Ed Davey became the first major party leader to call for October's energy price cap rise to be scrapped, and for a further Windfall Tax to be imposed on gas and oil giants. This

Agenda Item No. 4

measure would save the average household in Wyre Forest £1400.

Council recognises the numerous ways in which both National and Local Government can provide support to local people to ease the burden of rising prices. Council therefore calls on the Government to:

- Immediately reduce the standard rate of VAT from 20 per cent to 17.5 per cent for one year, saving the average household in Wyre Forest a further £600 this year
- Immediately re-introduce the pensions triple lock to support Wyre Forest pensioners, rather than wait until next Spring, saving elderly residents an additional £300.
- Immediately restore the Universal Credit supplement of £20, which was cancelled by the Government in September 2021.

Council instructs the Chief Executive to write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to express the Council's demands for the October energy price cap rise to be cancelled, VAT to be cut to 17.5%, the pensions triple-lock to be re-introduced and the £20 Universal Credit supplement to be restored.

Council calls for a local Cost-of-Living Emergency Summit, with stakeholders, including Citizens Advice, Food Banks, Local Trades Unions, the Chamber of Commerce and local MP to explore how more local help can be provided for those struggling with the cost of living – including extending the use of discretionary payments.

Finally Council instructs the Chief Executive to write to the Leader of all other District Councils in Worcestershire asking them to pass similar emergency motions so we can take a united stand as Local Government to force the Government to do more to help local people.

3. Notice of Motion from the Liberal Democrat Group

Councillor S Miah presented and outlined the reasons for the motion. The motion was seconded by Councillor F Oborski MBE.

Councillor M Hart tabled an amendment to the motion on behalf of the Conservative Group. He outlined the reasons for the amendment which was seconded by Councillor N Gale.

A discussion on the amendment ensued. Councillor Miah said that he welcomed the amendment and was happy to accept it. Councillor F Oborski seconded the proposal.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Safety thanked the Liberal Democrat Group for submitting the motion and raising the issues.

Agenda Item No. 4

Upon a show of hands, the motion as amended, was unanimously agreed.

Decision: The following motion from the Liberal Democrat Group, as amended by the Conservative Group be agreed: This Council:-

Notes the obligations it owes to the Armed Forces community within Wyre Forest as enshrined in the Armed Forces Covenant;

Welcomes the Armed Forces Act 2021, which passed Royal Assent 15 December 2021 and places a new statutory duty on local authorities to have due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant;

Looks forward to early commencement of the legislation that will give force to the Statutory Guidance on the Armed Forces Covenant Duty, and welcomes the Government's engagement with Councils in drafting this guidance.

Notes that the Local Authorities can set an example for local employers in also supporting our Armed Forces Community by signing up for the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme and encouraging others to do so. Welcomes that the Council already disregards, in calculating entitlement to council tax reduction scheme and housing benefit, military compensation awarded through the War Pension Scheme (WPS), Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) or through a veteran's occupational pension Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS), known as Service Invaliding Pensions (SIPs) or Service Attributable Pensions (SAPs). This Council expresses concern that similar disregards are not applied for all military compensation schemes when assessing eligibility for support in respect of Disabled Facilities Grants, as a result of the means test prescribed in legislation.

Notes that the Council has the opportunity to set-out policy priorities through the Housing Assistance Policy 2020 for specific groups and calls for a review of this policy.

In support of the recommendations and findings of the Royal British Legion's 2020 report Making the Benefits System Fit for Service and also recognising this Council can do more to support our Armed Forces Community, this Council resolves to:-

Call on the Government quickly to amend legislation and guidance in respect of Disabled Facilities Grants so that military compensation is not treated as income or taken into account in assessing eligibility for support; Request officers to bring back a report to Council outlining how it could offer priority for Disabled Facilities Grant funding for members of the Armed Forces Community, especially those that have been injured during service.

Request that the CEO ensure the Council work towards achieving the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Bronze Award.

Agenda Item No. 4

To work with partners across Worcestershire to update the Armed Forces Covenant in light of the time since it was signed in 2012 and reflecting improved commitment to our veterans in the Armed Forces Act 2021. To communicate this motion to the Member of Parliament for Wyre Forest and thank him for supporting the Armed Forces Act and seek a response from the relevant Government Minister, to be reported to a future meeting of Council.

C.47 Emergency Motions submitted under Standing Orders

There were no urgent motions.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 9.02pm.

The meeting is available for viewing on the Council's website
<https://wyreforestdc.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcasts>