

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER

17 JULY 2023 (6PM)

Present:

Councillors: M J Hart (Chairman), I Hardiman (Vice-Chairman), B Brookes, D Morehead, T L Onslow and D Ross.

Observers:

Councillors: R Drew and A Sutton.

Observed remotely: Councillors: F M Oborski MBE, C Rogers and L Whitehouse.

CAB.10 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

CAB.11 Declarations of Interests by Members

No declarations of interest were made.

CAB.12 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 13 June 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CAB.13 Call Ins

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

CAB.14 Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There were no items requiring urgent attention.

CAB.15 Public Participation

There was no public participation.

CAB.16 Internal Audit Service Review

A report was considered from the Head of Resources and Section 151 Officer that sought approval to secure a new delivery model for the internal audit service to secure long-term resilience in meeting the Council's regulatory obligations to undertake an internal audit.

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

The Cabinet Member gave a summary of the background and key issues detailed in the report. He explained that Internal Audit was an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve an organisation's operations. He added that it helped an organisation to accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes. He further explained that the Council was required under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 to undertake an effective internal audit.

The Cabinet Member advised that the core structure of the Internal Audit Team remained fit for purpose, but both the position of Senior Auditor and Auditor became vacant during 2022-23 and the Internal Audit Manager has indicated her intention to retire later this year. He added that, despite looking at both direct recruitment and use of agency temporary appointments, both positions remained vacant.

He outlined the four options available to the authority and highlighted the associated risks as set out in section 8 of the report.

In conclusion, he said that seeking an external contract (option 2) was the only viable solution in the short term. He added that buying through CCS complied with procurement regulations but simplified the process, and the framework gave access to services at competitive rates without having to run a full tendering exercise. Therefore, he proposed that the authority implement Option 2 and seek to procure the service via the CCS framework.

The Leader of the Council seconded the proposals.

Decision: Cabinet

- 1.1 AGREED that the procurement of a service contract to secure delivery of the approved 2023-24 audit plan should commence and APPROVED the evaluation criteria in Appendix 2 of the report, in order to provide an internal audit opinion for 2023-24.**
- 1.2 DELEGATED authority to award the services contract to the Head of Resources and s151 officer in consultation with the Solicitor to the Council and the Cabinet member for Finance and Capital Portfolio.**

CAB.17 Wyre Forest District Council Health and Wellbeing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

A report was considered from the Head of Strategic Growth on the Wyre Forest District Council Health and Wellbeing Supplementary Planning Document, following the recent consultation exercise.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and the Green

Agenda presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval.

The Cabinet Member gave a summary of the background and key issues detailed in the report. He explained that the Health and Wellbeing SPD was required to support the implementation of policies in the WFDC adopted Local Plan 2016-2036, specifically policies SP.16 Health and Wellbeing and DM.18 Hot food takeaways. He added that the SPD logically had to make provision about those matters because of the content of the adopted Local Plan. However, the SPD cannot vary the policies in SP.16 and DM.18 set out in that Plan.

The Cabinet Member further explained that the SPD went out for consultation from 13 February to the 20 March 2023. He said he was confident all the responses to the consultation had been addressed as set out in section 4.1 of the report. He explained that Cabinet did seek further clarification on hot food takeaways that were not open during school hours. He added that the policy was prepared in partnership with the Public Health team at Worcestershire County Council and went through unchallenged at examination. As of April 2022, it was adopted along with the rest of the local plan. Therefore, to approve any takeaway within 400m of a school, even it opens after school hours would be a departure from policy.

In conclusion, he said that the document had been prepared in partnership with the Strategic Growth Planning Team and the Public Health Team at Worcestershire County Council as well as with other colleagues in WFDC. It would provide further detail to policies contained within the adopted Local Plan, and would assist applicants completing a Health Impact Assessment, if required to do so. He added that, once adopted, the SPD would be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

The Leader of the Council seconded the proposals.

The Vice-chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor F Oborski MBE presented the recommendations from its meeting on 6 July 2023.

Decision: In line with the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from its meeting on 6 July 2023, Cabinet:

1.1 CONSIDERED the amended Health and Wellbeing SPD and consultation statement following the public consultation responses AND;

1.2 AGREED that the Health and Wellbeing SPD be adopted.

CAB.18 Localism: Stourport Sports Club and Bewdley Museum

In light of the new administration's approach towards localism, a report was considered from the Chief Executive to take steps to revoke the previous decisions in respect of Stourport Sports Club and Bewdley Museum.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Well-being

presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval.

The Cabinet Member gave a summary of the background and key issues detailed in the report. He explained that the localism strategy adopted in 2019 was being reviewed by the Cabinet and a report would be brought forward in September to adopt a new strategy.

He said that the Cabinet expected the focus of the new strategy to be on the District Council working collaboratively and proactively with town and parish councils and other groups, to enhance and improve the offer, and also to encourage and empower volunteering to support local assets and services, building on existing arrangements. He added that asset transfers were not expected to have the same prominence as they have done over the last four years.

He further explained that the new administration elected in May 2023 did not support exiting involvement in the Stourport Sports Club. He said that outcome was agreed by full Council as part of the medium-term financial strategy in February 2022 and the detailed approach was put into effect by the then Cabinet in decisions taken in July 2022. He added that twelve months after the previous decision, the parties to the management agreement have not agreed the July 2022 proposals.

In relation to Bewdley Museum, the Cabinet Member explained that, whilst establishing an independent trust to take over ownership and operation of the Museum was actively pursued and a trust was established, in June 2022 the trustees decided that they did not wish to progress with the transfer. He said subsequent discussions had been held with Bewdley Town Council about the possibility of a transfer to the Town Council, but no conclusion had been reached. He further explained that the Cabinet had informed the Town Council that it would not be pursuing the discussions further.

In conclusion, for good governance and transparency, it was appropriate formally to revoke the extant Cabinet decisions so that there was clarity for members of the Council, staff and the public about the future.

The Leader seconded the proposals.

Decision: Cabinet:

- 1.1 REVOKED the decisions on Stourport Sports Club taken by the Cabinet on 13 July 2022 (minute CAB.13) and the decisions on Bewdley Museum taken by the Cabinet on 10 November 2020 (minute CAB.43).**
- 1.2 RECOMMENDED to Council that it should rescind its decision in the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2022-25 which involved exiting the Council's involvement in the Stourport Sports Club Limited.**

CAB.19 Worcestershire Housing Strategy 2023 - 2040

A report was considered from the Head of Strategic Growth that outlined the

Worcestershire Housing Strategy that had been developed in partnership with councils and partners across the county.

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

The Cabinet Member gave a summary of the background and key issues detailed in the report. He explained that whilst there was no longer a legal requirement to have a Housing Strategy, many of the elements contained within the housing strategy, such as housing needs assessments and stock conditions surveys were still requirements under the Housing Act 1985.

He said in 2016 the Council approved the development of the Worcestershire Housing Partnership Plan which commenced in 2017; the Worcestershire Housing Strategy 2023-2040 was the replacement document to the Partnership Plan.

The Cabinet Member further explained that the Strategy had been developed by the seven councils and a number of key stakeholders across the county to deliver on a vision and priorities until 2040. He added that the priorities were far reaching and sought to prepare Worcestershire for the future considering the important role housing can play in the economy, health and social care as well as climate change.

The Leader seconded the proposals.

The Vice-chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee presented the recommendations from its meeting on 6 July 2023.

Decision: In line with the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from its meeting on 6 July 2023, Cabinet:

- 1.1 NOTED the Worcestershire Housing Strategy AND;**
- 1.2 AGREED that a local action plan should be developed for Wyre Forest and brought back through the committee process to a future Cabinet meeting for approval.**

CAB.20 Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF)

A report was received from the Head of Strategic Growth to consider how to proceed in order to deliver the commitments that the Council had made in respect of the Local Authority Housing Fund.

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

The Cabinet Member gave a summary of the background, key issues and financial implications as detailed in the report.

He explained following the launch of Government schemes in 2021 to resettle Afghan refugees, including those who had worked to support British forces in

Afghanistan, Wyre Forest had accommodated two Afghan families for which it had given a commitment as part of the response from Worcestershire councils. He added that in February 2023 the Council approved participation in what has turned out to be round 1 of the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) as part of the decisions on the Medium-term Financial Strategy for 2023-2026.

He said that this committed the Council to providing 6 properties for Ukrainian households and one property for an Afghan household by November 2023. He further explained that once the properties were no longer required for rehousing refugees they could become general needs or temporary accommodation stock. He added that the properties for Ukrainian households could be any size to suit needs. However the property for an Afghan household had to be a minimum of 4 bedrooms.

The Leader seconded the proposals.

Decision: The Cabinet ALLOCATED £169,924 from the Evergreen Investment Fund to provide match funding to purchase a unit of accommodation for an Afghan household being transferred from bridging hotel accommodation.

CAB.21 Redevelopment of 8A Bridge Street, Stourport

A report was considered from the Head of Strategic Growth to support proposals to redevelop the locally listed building which had been vacant for a considerable period.

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

The Cabinet Member gave a summary of the background, key issues and financial implications as detailed in the report. He explained that 8A Bridge Street had remained empty for a number of years since the last tenant of the building, a charity which used the ground floor for commercial purposes, left.

He said that the proposals would see the first floor refurbished into two, one bed self-contained properties for emergency accommodation, that would be managed by the Council's Strategic Growth team, and the repurposing of the ground floor space as an information point/heritage centre that would be leased to Stourport-on-Severn Town Council.

The Leader seconded the proposals.

Decision: Cabinet;

- 1.1 ALLOCATED funding from the Evergreen Investment Fund to fund refurbishment of the first floor and funding from the Capital Innovation Fund (estimated costs in Appendix One), supported by borrowing, to fund refurbishment and adaption of the ground floor; and NOTED that inclusion of public toilets in the ground floor works would occur only if Stourport on Severn Town Council provides the funding for them;**

- 1.2 **APPROVED** procurement of a construction contractor to undertake the works and **DELEGATED** to the Head of Strategic Growth, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Well-being, Head of Resources and Solicitor to the Council, approval of the evaluation criteria based on 70% quality/30% price and award of the contract;
- 1.3 **DELEGATED** to the Head of Strategic Growth, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Well-being, Head of Resources and Solicitor to the Council, to enter into a 125 year lease of the ground floor to Stourport on Severn Town Council.

CAB.22 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.23 Agenda item 9.4 - Redevelopment of 8A Bridge Street, Stourport - EXEMPT Appendix 1 – Business case

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Well-being 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.

CAB.24 Future High Streets Fund (FHSF)

A report was considered from the Head of North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration (NWEDR) that sought decisions in respect of an FHSF project.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and the Green Agenda presented the confidential report and formally moved the recommendations for approval.

The Cabinet Member gave a detailed summary of the background and key issues that had necessitated the proposals. He outlined the financial implications and potential funding sources for the project as detailed in the confidential report.

He explained that the FHSF grant allocation must be spent by 31 March 2024 to avoid the risk of forfeiture, if the variation for the additional work was not approved, there was a significant risk that the grant would not be spent by the cut-off date and would therefore be reclaimed.

The Leader seconded the proposals.

Decision: The Cabinet:

- 1.1 a) **APPROVED** variation of the construction contract with the contractor named in the report to carry out the additional works required to address the dry and wet rot issues, as detailed in the specialist survey report;
- b) **DELEGATED** authority to implement the agreed variations to the Head of North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration, in consultation with the Solicitor to the Council, the Head of Resources and the Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning & the Green Agenda;
- c) **RECOMMENDED** to Council that the capital programme allocation for the Future High Streets Fund is amended to include an additional amount as set out in the confidential report, on the basis of the funding arrangements set out in section 5 of the confidential report;
- d) **AGREED TO CONSIDER** the revenue implication of any borrowing required to fund the project when preparing the 2024-27 Medium Term Financial Strategy, making appropriate revenue provision for external interest expense and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP).

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 7.28pm.

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