

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY,
KIDDERMINSTER

20TH SEPTEMBER 2023 (6PM)

Present:

Councillors: C Rogers (Chairman), J F Byng (Vice-Chairman), J Aston, E Bourne, B Brookes, L Carroll, G Connolly, N J Desmond, R Drew, H E Dyke, P Dyke, K Gale, N Gale, J Griffiths, I Hardiman, P Harrison, M J Hart, K Henderson, D Little, M McDonnell, S Miah, D Morehead, F M Oborski MBE, T L Onslow, M Rayner, D Ross, D Russell, A Sutton, L Whitehouse, N Wilson and P W M Young.

C.92 Prayers

Prayers were read by Rev David Hildred – Team Rector Kidderminster East.

C.93 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: V Caulfield and N Martin.

C.94 Declarations of Interests by Members

No declarations of interest were made.

C.95 Minutes

Decision: The Minutes of the last meeting held on 19 July 2023 and the Minutes from the special meeting held on 19 July 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

C.96 Public Participation

There was no public participation.

C.97 Chairman's Communications

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

The Chairman announced that he was holding a charity quiz on 14 October, at Stourport Yacht Club. His chosen charity is Midlands Air Ambulance.

C.98 Leader's Announcements and Report

The Leader of the Council referred members to his tabled report. A copy of the announcements is available for viewing on the Council's website.

https://forms.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/council/docs/doc58902_20230920_council_report.pdf

C.99 Members' scheme of allowances - Independent Remuneration Panel Report for 2023/24 and Subsequent Years

Council received a report from the Chief Executive that invited members to consider and take decisions on the Independent Remuneration Panel's (IRP) report and recommendations for the period from May 2023 to March 2026.

The Leader of the Council presented the report and outlined the key issues. He said that the administration would be accepting the IRP's recommendations in full, with a slight addition.

He said it was not a good use of the IRP's and Council's time for a Panel to be convened in 2025 to provide recommendations for one year only (2026-2027). He proposed an amendment to the effect that in 2025 the Panel should also make recommendations for 2027-2028, 2028-2029 and 2029-2030. He added that historically the Panel had made recommendations for four years and it was logical to continue in this way.

The Leader thanked the members of the IRP; Mr Hipkiss, Mr Reynolds and Mrs Wall, for undertaking the work and producing a comprehensive report.

Councillor I Hardiman said that he had trust in the IRP and was grateful for their input. He seconded the proposals. A discussion ensued and a number of members spoke in support of the recommendations as amended.

Upon a vote, the proposals were unanimously agreed.

Decision: Council;

- 1.1 accepted the recommendations from the Independent Remuneration Panel for 2023-2024, 2024-2025 and 2025-2026;**
- 1.2 agreed that a Panel should be convened in 2025 to provide recommendations for 2026-2027, 2027-2028, 2028-2029 and 2029-2030; and**
- 1.3 authorised the Solicitor to the Council to convene a Panel at that time, after seeking expressions of interest in serving from suitably qualified persons who are independent of the Council and having consulted Group Leaders prior to making appointments to the Panel.**

C.100 Amendments to the Constitution

A report was received from the Chief Executive that asked Council to consider amendments to the Constitution including arrangements for remote participation by members and officers in formal meetings of committees of the Council.

The Leader presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval. He said the report was relatively straightforward and in essence was a tidying up exercise to regularise what the Council were already doing.

Councillor I Hardiman seconded the recommendation.

Upon a vote, the proposal was unanimously agreed.

Decision: Council AGREED the amendments to the Constitution set out in Appendix A of the report.

C.101 Policy and Budget Framework – Matters which require a decision by Council

Recommendations from Cabinet, 12 September 2023

(a) Adoption of Corporate Plan, 2023-2027

The Leader presented the recommendation and formally moved it for approval. He thanked the members of the Cabinet Advisory Panel for their work, and expressed his gratitude to all the stakeholders, organisations and members of the public that had taken part and responded to the consultation events that have helped shape the Corporate Plan.

Councillor I Hardiman said it was a clear, well defined Plan and was happy to second the proposal. A robust debate ensued.

Upon a vote, the proposal was unanimously agreed.

Decision: Council ADOPTED the Corporate Plan in appendix 1 of the Cabinet report.

C.102 Questions

Nine questions had been submitted by members of the council in accordance with standing orders.

The Chairman announced that in the absence of Councillor V Caulfield question number four had been withdrawn

Councillor T Onslow left that meeting at 6.54pm.

1. Question from Councillor F Oborski MBE to the Cabinet Member

for Operational Services

Disposable Vapes are said to be a " fire hazard" when disposed of in the normal waste system as they contain lithium batteries which can explode. "Good Practice" indicates that the retail outlets selling these products should provide collection bins to which used vapes should be returned. What steps is WFDC taking to encourage retail outlets to provide such collection bins and how many such bins are currently provided in the district?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

All Wyre Forest residents are advised to dispose of waste appropriately, vapes can be returned to most retailers for recycling or can be disposed of at any household recycling centres as WEEE waste with the battery disposed of in its own container.

Supplementary Question

It is rumoured that His Majesty's Government may follow other countries in banning disposable vapes. Will the Cabinet Member lobby our Member of Parliament to support such a move?

Councillor T Onslow returned to the meeting at this point, (6.56pm).

Supplementary Answer

Yes, Councillor Oborski, I can give you that promise I will.

2. Question from Councillor M Rayner to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

In your manifesto you say you are going to make Wyre Forest Cleaner. Please can you explain how you are ensuring this is happening?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

We are ensuring that this will happen by increasing the number of front-line officers on our streets and by allocating additional resources, both of which you and the administration which you were part of voted against in February this year, when the Conservatives' alternative budget proposals came to this council.

Supplementary Question

Please can you tell us how you are going to specifically tackle dog fouling on the streets and in places, of bags of dog excreta hanging off trees and so on. It is extremely prolific in the Wyre Forest. It is particularly concerning and important because dog excreta contains bacteria, parasites, and viruses, which are extremely dangerous to humans and other animals, in particular toxocariasis which leads to central nervous system damage?

Supplementary Answer

We will ensure that we have an additional Environmental Protection Officer, which is something that you voted against in February.

3. Question from Councillor L Whitehouse to the Leader of the Council

Can the Leader of the Council please confirm to this chamber that he

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expects the highest standards from each of his Group's members and that they must be professional, example setting, responsive and fair at all times?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

Yes.

Supplementary Question

Will the Leader ensure, when these issues or questions are brought to his attention, he will make sure these are dealt with, and prompt responses provided?

Supplementary Answer

For those of you who don't know me well and indeed those who do, I did so in the previous 5 years I was Leader of this Council and I see no reason why I would not do so in future, and of course my only plea is that other Group Leaders do exactly the same.

4. Question withdrawn

5. Question from Councillor L Carroll to the Cabinet Member for Operational services

Do you believe that every child in the district should have access to inclusive play equipment?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

In a one-word answer, yes.

Supplementary Question

This answer should be very easy then. Can you tell this Council how much has been set aside, monetary wise, for inclusive play equipment and which sites are in scope?

Supplementary Answer

In February, the Conservative opposition allocated £50,000 towards this and something that your Group and your Leader voted against in our proposal.

6. Question from Councillor L Whitehouse to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

Can the Cabinet Member please confirm to this Council and members of the public that he is happy with the appearance of the public realm in our district?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

I am a lot happier with the appearance of our public realm since the 4th May.

Supplementary Question

In the plan that we have just seen the vision says a safe, vibrant, and clean place to live, work and visit. Perhaps the Cabinet Member would like to visit my ward, particularly Blakebrook; St. Johns Avenue, Greatfield Road,

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Sutton Road and Habberley estate, specifically in relation to weeds and detritus. The question is will he commit to reviewing the state of the street scene throughout the district and report back to members with an action plan, including liaising with Worcestershire County Council to establish what has gone wrong this year with their weed control measures they are responsible for?

Supplementary Answer

Yes, I am happy to commit to do that and we are already doing that. We are reviewing that, and we have had a conversation with Worcestershire County Council, trying to rebuild the relationships that were damaged under the previous administration.

7. Question from Councillor L Carroll to the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure, Arts and Community Safety

What is the administration doing to support young people in the district?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure, Arts and Community Safety

Back in 2019 Wyre Forest District Council had a thriving community sports and events directorate and I know that because it was set up by the Conservatives, and that directorate ran full year long programmes across the district, not only for young people, but also for older people and disabled groups. There were events in the parks, in the nature reserves, with the sports facilities and they were district wide. There was a whole host of summer events for our young people, including the pond dipping and the horrible bat thing. But sadly, in February 2020 the Progressive Alliance, which included the Labour Group at that time, who were running the Council, put forward proposals not only to scrap the entire programme but also at reasonable expense to make all the staff redundant. The Conservatives at that time put up alternative proposals to counter these cuts but sadly these were voted down by the Progressive Alliance, and to be clear that included your Labour Group. They voted unanimously to support the cuts and the axing of the programme. But that is all very negative, so on the positive side you will be pleased to hear you can trust the Tories. We are supporting and co-ordinating with our partners, such as Bewdley Museum and Stourport Sports Club, we are pushing for a return of events for young people. In addition to our plans, thanks to the resilience of the brilliant and creative staff who were left through their commitment and motivation, we also, via North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership, fund Kidderminster and District Youth Trust to provide detached youth services. Wyre Forest District Council also participate in Get Safe which is the Worcestershire multi-agency group, who work with children and young people who are at risk of criminal exploitation. Bewdley Museum puts on a range of holiday activities and an education programme for in excess of 8,000 children. Wyre Forest District also commissioned youth activities using public health funding and helped to deliver Ready Steady Worcestershire holiday activities. With Public Health funding we also have community builders who work in specific areas across the district to put on activities to benefit children. They also organise the show case of mental health and wellbeing services for young people. Wyre Forest District Council also funds, as I know do some Councillors, Nightstop to

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provide an education programme and mediation service for 11+ year olds to help with homelessness, family break down and relationship issues. Finally through the Wyre Forest Collaborative, Wyre Forest District Council also employs collaborative project officers to assist with health and mental health issues for young people. So, I think in short, we aren't doing what we used to, but we are doing what we can, and moving forward we hope to do more.

Supplementary Question

Youth unemployment is 12.75% nationally compared to 4.7% unemployment overall, what is the level of youth unemployment in the district?

Supplementary Answer

Chair I am sorry, what has that question got to do with my portfolio at the District Council, it is about youth unemployment? We do not have a department that does youth services now, Councillor Carroll, because in 2019 your Group voted to get rid of it.

The Chairman advised that it was a valid supplementary question as the original question was: what is the administration doing to support young people in the district?

8. Question from Councillor F Oborski MBE to the Leader of the Council

When the Chief Executive's Appraisal was carried out I remember it being agreed that the temporary car park on the former Crown House site would have a banner along the perimeter guard rails of the car park on the Baxter Church side, explaining that it was a temporary car park. What progress has been made in getting said banners installed?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

I can tell you what progress exactly, excellent progress, because it is already there. There is now a nice light blue banner on the side of the former Crown House site at the carpark, with our logo and EDR logo on it. There is more coming as well, because to be fair she specifically asked about the Baxter Church side and I am reliably informed that we are going to be having a number of additional banners installed next week, so you will definitely be able to hold me to account at the next meeting of full Council if they have not been erected. So, we are getting there in the end Councillor Oborski.

Supplementary Question

Last week at a presentation at Kidderminster Town Council, the representatives of the BID suggested that they were going to install flower planter baskets along that barrier opposite Baxter Church. Is the District Council consulting with the BID about their proposals or are we just going to put our banners up and let them fit planters in between them if they can?

Supplementary Answer

I am sure that those who know far greater than me and indeed those who think they know, are working behind the scenes to ensure that we have a

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seamless and joined-up approach between ourselves as a District Council, the Town Council and representatives of the BID. If they want to put lots of lovely planters with winter pansies or whatever through the autumnal months, we will be delighted for them to do so.

9. Question from Councillor L Whitehouse to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

Can the Cabinet Member please confirm the frequency of channel and footway mechanical sweeping throughout the district, confirming that all roads are swept regularly?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

Yes, all roads are swept regularly, mechanical sweeping is done every day, with the town centres being swept daily and the outside areas of the centres being swept on an 8 week cycle. The channels in the district are again swept daily, and each gutter is cleared at least twice a year.

Supplementary Question

It is clear that many streets are not frequently swept. Will the Cabinet Member commit to reviewing all footway and channel sweeping routes, including route optimisation, and provide the current and future schedules to all members of this Council, and publish routes on the website so that residents can check for themselves rather than having to make contact with members or the Council directly?

Supplementary Answer

Yes, that is something I will consider, and I will speak with the officers.

C.103 Motions Submitted Under Standing Orders

No motions were received by the deadline.

C.104 Emergency Motions submitted under Standing Orders

There were no emergency motions.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 7.10pm.

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