

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER

13 DECEMBER 2023 (6PM)

Present:

Councillors: C Rogers (Chairman), J F Byng (Vice-Chairman), J Aston, E Bourne, B Brookes, L Carroll, V Caulfield, 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, N Martin, M McDonnell, S Miah, D Morehead, F M Oborski MBE, T L Onslow, D Ross, D Russell, A Sutton, L Whitehouse and P W M Young.

C.105 Prayers

Prayers were said by Deacon Becky Lovatt, Minister at the Wesley Methodist Chapel, Stourport.

C.106 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: M Rayner and N Wilson.

C.107 Declarations of Interests by Members

No declarations of interest were made.

C.108 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

C.109 Public Participation

In accordance with the Council's scheme for public participation at meetings of Full Council, the following members of the public addressed the meeting at this point: Councillor Liam Carroll.

The petition referred to below was circulated at the meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome all fellow councillors, council officers and members of public watching here in the chamber and those at home. I am here today to present a petition that has been signed by 33 residents in my ward as can be seen in the agenda. The petition reads, We, the undersigned, are concerned residents who urge Wyre Forest District

Council to act now to create an additional polling station in OFC-2 to ensure that voting is accessible to all.

This is an issue that was raised with me prior to having the privilege to being elected to serve the excellent residents of Offmore and Comberton and I have been waiting for an opportunity to raise the concerns outlined in the petition. This exact issue was raised with me four times on polling day alone. The OFC-2 polling district used to have a polling station and is missed by many. Residents in the OFC-2 polling district have to walk up to over half an hour to the nearest polling station which is currently St. Chad's Church. The Chief Executive and I walked from Leswell Lane to St. Chad's Church in the pouring rain last Thursday. It took us approximately 26 minutes to walk the distance. Whilst it would be unfair to compare our fitness levels to the likes of Sir Mo Farah, I would like to think we both walked that route at a good pace. The same distance could take someone with mobility issues or those walking with Children at least 35 minutes. That is over 1hr 10 minutes round trip to exercise their right to vote which I believe to be unacceptable, a sentiment echoed, I'm certain, by many within and beyond this chamber.

The lack of adequate public transport in our area, coupled with limited access to vehicles for many residents, leaves walking as the sole option. While Postal Votes remain an alternative, the traditional voting method is often preferred for a variety of reasons. Furthermore, residents should have the liberty to choose how they exercise their voting rights.

I intend to delve deeper into this matter in Agenda Item 8. My aim today was to clearly present the concerns of our residents, and I hope I have achieved that. Thank you.

C.110 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 extended a huge thank you to everyone who had made a contribution to the Chairman's Foodbank Christmas Appeal.

C.111 Leader of the Council Announcements

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.

http://www.wyreforest.gov.uk/council/docs/doc59087_20231213_council_agenda.pdf

C.112 Review of Polling districts and polling places

Council received a report from the Chief Executive, which invited members to consider and make decisions on the recommended changes / options for change to polling districts and polling places.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio, presented the report and outlined the key issues, highlighting the response to the consultation as set out in Section 6 of the report and recommendations at Section 2 incorporating the proposal that the polling place for MI-SN1 should be designated as Stourport Community Centre, Lower Lickhill Road; the polling place for AKR-SC should be designated as Severn’s Club, Lickhill Road; and that the polling place for BHS-5 should be designated as Baxter College, Habberley Road DY13 8SB.

The Leader of the Council said that he supported the recommendations and seconded the proposals as set out by Councillor Ross reserving the right to speak. Councillor Liam Carroll then proposed an amendment to the recommendations for the polling place for polling district OFC-2 to be designated as St Ambrose Catholic Primary School based on the distance that some residents have to travel in order to vote and the lack of public transport to reach St Chad’s Church. Councillor Leigh Whitehouse seconded this proposal.

An amendment to the amendment was proposed by Councillor Fran Oborski to use the Fred Bennett Centre instead of St Ambrose Catholic Primary School as the polling place for polling district OFC-2, it being more suitable in her opinion.

Councillor Liam Carroll accepted Councillor Oborski’s suggested amendment and a robust debate ensued. As the proposer of the original amendment, he and the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio were given the opportunity to sum up on the revised amendment and a vote was called. The majority of members voted against the amendment.

Further debate then took place around the remaining recommendations and clarification was made on the name of the polling place for polling district OFC-2, which should be Offmore Church Hall. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio summed up on the substantive set of proposals and thanked members for taking part and voicing their opinions. The vote for the recommendations was carried, with the majority of members voting in favour.

Decision: Council: CONSIDERED the responses to the review of polling districts and places:

1.2 DECIDED that the following changes should be implemented with effect from 1 March 2024:

Issue	Change
Creation of new polling district within existing polling district WFR-CO	<p>A new polling district should be created within WFR-CO, to Be designated WFR-CO2.</p> <p>The boundaries should be based on Option A.</p> <p>The polling place for the new polling district</p>

to serve Lea Castle	should be designated as Cookley Sports and Social Club.
Polling place for OFC-3 and OFC-4	Offmore Church Hall should be designated as the polling place for OFC-3 and OFC-4.
Polling place for MI-SN1 and AKR-SC	The polling place for MI-SN1 should be designated as Stourport Community Centre, Lower Lickhill Road, and the polling place for AKR-SC should be designated as Severn's Club, Lickhill Road DY13 8SB.
Polling place for BHS-5	The polling place for BHS-5 should be designated as Baxter College, Habberley Road.
Other polling districts and polling places	No change.

C.113 Policy And Budget Framework – Matters which require a decision by Council

a. Recommendations from the Treasury Management Review Panel – 13 November 2023

- **Annual Report on Treasury Management Service and Actual Prudential Indicators 2022-23**

The Chairman proposed the recommendations and formally moved them for approval. They were seconded by the Leader of the Council and were agreed unanimously.

Decision: Council:

APPROVED the actual 2022-23 prudential and treasury indicators in the report;

APPROVED the actual 2022-23 non-treasury prudential indicators for Capital Portfolio Fund properties;

NOTED the annual treasury management report for 2022-23, including information on the non-treasury prudential indicators for Capital Portfolio Fund properties.

b. Recommendations from the Treasury Management Review Panel – 13 November 2023

- **Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy Mid-year Review Report 2023-24**

The Chairman proposed the recommendation, formally moved it for approval and it was seconded by the Leader of the Council. The recommendation was agreed by all members of the Council.

Decision: Council APPROVED the Mid-year Review and all updated Prudential Indicators, Ratios and the Liability Benchmark.

c. Recommendations from the Licensing and Environmental Committee – 4 December 2023

- **Review of Fees and Charges for the Council’s Licensing and Regulatory Services Function 2024/25**

The Chairman of the Licensing and Environmental Committee proposed the recommendation and it was seconded by the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure, Arts & Community Safety. A brief discussion took place to check understanding and, upon a vote, the proposal was unanimously agreed.

Decision: Council AGREED that the proposals for fees and charges within the Council’s Licensing, Food, Health, Safety and Pollution Control functions for 2024/25, as detailed in the report, be included in the Council’s 2024/25 budget strategy.

C.114

Questions

Three questions had been submitted by members of the Council in accordance with standing orders.

The Chairman announced that, in the absence of Councillor Mary Rayner, question number two had been withdrawn.

1. Question from Councillor F Oborski MBE to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, and Well-being.

Earlier this year we were told that the Council had received funding to purchase 7 properties. 6 were to be used for Ukrainian refugees and 1 for Afghans. Can the Cabinet Member tell me what progress has been made on this matter?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, and Well-being.

The Council completed the delivery of the 7 properties in advance of the end date in November thanks to the hard work of the Strategic Growth and Legal teams.

2 properties were purchased by the Council, one of these will be for an

Afghan family, yet to be identified and supported by the County Council service, and the second will be for Ukrainians or temporary accommodation supported in house. The first property should be ready for letting in January, the other property requires more substantial work, so the team are presently developing a specification for the works.

The other 5 properties are owned and managed by Community Housing Group and will be for Ukrainians and/or temporary accommodation. All are still undergoing works, but 2 should be ready quite shortly.

All councillors with properties in their wards have been advised, but not given the addresses to preserve anonymity.

Supplementary Question

Whilst I understand the need for anonymity, it would actually be very helpful if you were to give councillors the addresses in confidence. I've had to deal with an unfortunate situation, where a large 5 bedroom council house in Offmore / Comberton is one of the ones that has been purchased, and unfortunately the workmen doing the works on behalf of the Council, gave all sorts of quite outlandish information to the neighbouring residents, who have been up in arms about it, and I've had to go and speak to 5 people so far and calm them down. Now, I understand the need for anonymity, but there is already a property on Offmore that's being used to support an Afghan family. As ward members we were told where it was, and we've been able to support that family and help them with getting their kids into school. I do think that we should be trusted, please, with confidential information so that we can know what to do when residents start haranguing us, and also so as local councillors we can actually support these probably quite vulnerable residents when they move into our wards. Please can you look into it?

Supplementary Answer

The answer I've had from the appropriate officers is that we don't share details of where anybody is rehoused, or information. Some of our Ukrainian families have been subjected to racism so we don't want their addresses in the public domain.

2. Question from Councillor Mary Rayner – Withdrawn

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

Could the cabinet member please set out the main reasons for homelessness in Wyre Forest and what the council is doing about it?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, and Well-being.

The four top reasons for homelessness are:-

Parents, friends, and relatives asking a person to leave.

Domestic abuse.

End of an assured short hold tenancy.

Non-violent relationship breakdown.

The council has a higher number of people approaching us at the

prevention stage, than relief stage, compared with the national average, which is positive. We, the District Council, offer a range of services directly and indirectly through support for Homeless Households, including trying to keep them in their homes through offering support and financial assistance, through to helping them to find alternative accommodation via the housing register, or accessing the private rented sector. We provide income maximisation and debt advice, pre-tenancy training, life skills training, and counselling, alongside access to housing, including through rent bonds and rent in advance. We host three regular prevention panels with partners, and this is around rough sleeping, domestic abuse, and homeless prevention, with social and private sector landlords to increase the early intervention and prevention work that we do.

Supplementary Question

Do you agree with the former Home Secretary, Suella Braverman's comments that our streets are taken over by people living on the streets as a lifestyle choice, and if you do not agree, will you write to the current Home Secretary about the good work being done by this Council and volunteer groups. And most importantly, will you look into the scheme operated at Hereford, where they are using pods as temporary housing?

Supplementary Answer

I think this is one where I can't personally answer the question directly, but I suggest perhaps you do the same that you are suggesting to me, in other words write to the Home Secretary.

C.115 Motions Submitted Under Standing Orders

No motions were received by the deadline.

C.116 Emergency Motions Submitted Under Standing Orders

There were no emergency motions.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 7.00pm.