

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY,
KIDDERMINSTER

21 FEBRUARY 2024 (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, N Martin, 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.117

Prayers

Prayers were said by Rev Sallie Butcher – Priest-in-Charge, Wyre Forest West – Baynton, Clows Top, Far Forest, Heightington, Mamble, Rock.

C.118

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor V Caulfield.

C.119

Declarations of Interests by Members

No declarations of interest were made.

C.120

Minutes

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

C.121

Public Participation

There was no public participation.

C.122

Chairman's Communications

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

C.123

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.

https://forms.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/council/docs/doc59253_20240221_council_report.pdf

C.124 Political Balance

Council considered a report from the Solicitor to the Council that sought to approve the revised table of political balance.

The Leader of the Council presented the report and formally moved the recommendation for approval. He outlined the changes to the political balance and explained that ultimately the position in respect of the allocation of seats on committees remained the same.

Councillor I Hardiman seconded the recommendation.

Upon a vote, the proposal was agreed.

Decision: Council APPROVED the revised table of political balance in Appendix 1 of the report.

C.125 Electoral arrangements and local government boundaries in Wyre Forest

Council received a report from the Chief Executive that sought to agree the Council's response to the draft recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission's review of electoral arrangements for Worcestershire County Council; and to agree to conduct a community governance review (CGR) for the parish of Wolverley and Cookley and the principle of other community governance reviews as set out in the report.

The Leader presented the report. He gave a summary of the background and key issues detailed in the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval.

A discussion ensued. The Leader acknowledged the concerns raised by a few members about the lack of communication with Town Councils by the Boundary Commission.

Councillor D Ross seconded the recommendations.

Upon a show of hands, the proposal was agreed.

Decision: Council AGREED;

- 1.1 The response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's review in Appendix 1 of the report;**
- 1.2 The principle of conducting a community governance review of the parish of Wolverley and Cookley, commencing on 1 August 2024 with a local advisory poll to be held on 1 May 2025;**
- 1.3 To receive a report in May 2024 to determine the terms of reference for the review and the details of the local advisory**

poll including the question to be asked in the poll;

- 1.4 The principle of conducting community governance reviews of Kidderminster Foreign and Kidderminster to examine among other things the electoral arrangements for the parish and town councils, with timetables and terms of reference for these reviews to be agreed at the meeting in July 2024.**

C.126 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-2027 and Capital Strategy 2024-2034

A report was received from the Head of Resources that invited Council to approve the Council's budget for 2024-2027 having considered the proposed budget decision recommended to Council by Cabinet.

The report also sought approval of the Capital Strategy for 2024-2034 including prudential indicators which set limits for non-financial investments and to fulfil the key requirements of the DLUHC Investment Guidance. As part of the overall approval sought the report of the Head of Resources in respect of statutory duties placed on Local Authority Chief Financial Officers in relation to budget setting and monitoring was considered.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval. He said that the budget proposals had been subject to public consultation; 976 responses had been received and almost all of the proposals received strong support.

He said the budget proposals from the administration together with the responses from the public consultation exercise had been discussed with members of other groups at the meeting of the Strategic Review Panel. He added that in addition to discussing the proposals put forward by the administration, the meeting provided an opportunity for other groups to present an alternative budget. He thanked Councillor F Oborski MBE for presenting an alternative budget proposal on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group. He added that two of the proposals put forward by the Group had been accepted by the Cabinet.

The Cabinet Member gave a summary of the ten proposals as outlined in the report considered by Cabinet on 13 February 2024.

In conclusion, the Cabinet Member said that the budget was in line with the Corporate Plan. It aimed to deliver on what was important to the residents of Wyre Forest and formed a robust medium term financial strategy (MTFS) which will deliver services and make the authority more commercially viable. He added that the budget set out identified achievable targets.

The Leader seconded the recommendations.

On behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group Councillor F Oborski MBE moved

Agenda Item No. 10

a set of amendments as set out in appendix 5 of the report. She thanked the Cabinet Member for taking on two of the proposals. She added that the amendments to the fee parking offer; second home premium and town hall meetings were not opposing the budget, but the amendments were designed to enhance it.

Councillor S Miah seconded the amendment.

A debate on the amendment ensued.

Named votes on the Liberal Democrat proposals were recorded as follows and the amendment was defeated:

For (3)

Councillors: S Miah, F Oborski MBE and L Whitehouse.

Against (24)

Councillors: E Bourne, B Brookes, J Byng, G Connolly, N Desmond, R Drew, H Dyke, P Dyke, K Gale, N Gale, J Griffiths, I Hardiman, P Harrison, M Hart, K Henderson, D Little, N Martin, D Morehead, T Onslow, C Rogers, D Ross, D Russell, A Sutton and N Wilson.

Abstained (5)

Councillors: J Aston, L Carroll, M McDonnell, M Rayner and P Young.

A robust discussion on the substantive budget proposals took place.

Councillors P Dyke and H Dyke left the meeting at 7.30pm and returned at 7.33pm.

Councillor N Gale left the meeting at 7.36pm and returned at 7.37pm.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio addressed a number of the issues raised during the debate. He said that a strong opposition makes a strong administration and looked forward to receiving more alternative budget proposals next year. He urged Council to support the proposals.

A named vote on the substantive budget proposals was recorded as follows and was agreed:

For (21)

Councillors: E Bourne, B Brookes, J Byng, G Connolly, N Desmond, R Drew, K Gale, N Gale, I Hardiman, P Harrison, M Hart, K Henderson, D Little, N Martin, D Morehead, T Onslow, C Rogers, D Ross, D Russell, A Sutton and N Wilson.

Against (5)

Agenda Item No. 10

Councillors: J Aston, S Miah, F Oborski MBE, M Rayner and L Whitehouse.

Abstained (6)

Councillors: L Carroll, H Dyke, P Dyke, J Griffiths, M McDonnell and P Young.

Decision: Council;

1.1 THREE YEAR BUDGET, CAPITAL STRATEGY AND POLICY FRAMEWORK 2024-2027

1.1.1 APPROVED the updated Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024-2027.

1.1.2 APPROVED the Cabinet Proposals – taking into account the impact on the Council’s Capital and Revenue Budgets for 2024-2027 as shown in the tables in paragraphs 6.1 and 6.3 and as set out below:

- a) provision of community leadership funding of £1,000 for each councillor across the period of the MTFs, at a cost of £33k in each year.**
- b) delivering actions set out in the new corporate plan by increasing capacity in the Civil Enforcement team at a cost of £39k in the second year. This will provide funding for one additional enforcement post in 2025-26.**
- c) delivering actions set out in the new corporate plan by increasing litter picking activity at a cost of £52k/£56k in 2024-25 and 2025-26.**
- d) capital investment of £50k for accessible play equipment, which will have a revenue cost for the borrowing of £7.5k/year.**
- e) a spend to save proposal to provide permanent capacity within the property team, at a cost of £116k/£120k/£123k to progress commercial rental income growth in line with the priority within the 2023-27 Corporate plan; cost of temporary agency resource is currently met from risk reserves; cost to be fully recouped from income growth from commercial rents.**
- f) changes to the senior management structure to provide capacity for delivery of the priorities in the corporate plan, at a cost of up to £11k/£15k/£15k.**
- g) introduction of free one hour parking at one car park in each of the three towns, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm. This builds**

Agenda Item No. 10

on the arrangements put in place in Bewdley in November as a consequence of the long-term traffic works. This is anticipated to cost £51k/£54k/£57k.

- h) to introduce web casting of meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a cost of £1k in each year to allow maximum access for the public and in order to be fully open and transparent.
- i) to explore and develop a commercial proposal to bring long term empty homes back into use to increase housing supply and help meet housing demand; and support an allocation from the Innovation Fund of up to £10k to fund the feasibility study.
- j) to hold a public engagement event with businesses, residents and stakeholders at Wyre Forest House for a State of the Area debate.

1.1.3 APPROVED the fees and charges in line with this Strategy, and the impact on the Council's Revenue Budget for 2024-2027, as shown in Appendix 3.

1.1.4 APPROVED the Council's updated Capital Strategy:

- a) Approval of the Capital Strategy 2024-2034 set out in Appendix 1 of the December Cabinet report and the updated, associated Quantitative Indicators set out in Appendix 2C of the report
- b) Approval of variations to the Capital Programme and Vehicle, Equipment and Systems Renewals Schedule as set out in Appendices 2A and 2B, of the report (which updates Appendix 1 of the Capital Strategy report to December 2023 Cabinet)
- c) Approval of the limits for gross debt for non-treasury investments compared to net service expenditure and for commercial income as a percentage of net service expenditure as set out in Appendix 2C of the report.

1.1.5 APPROVED that any Final Accounts savings arising from 2023-2024, together with surplus Earmarked Reserves, be allocated by the Head of Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio.

1.1.6 The General Fund Revenue Budget be APPROVED including all updates from the position in December 2023 as set out in the report.

1.2 COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATES

- 1.2.1 That Council Tax is increased by the higher limit specified by the Government of 3% and:
- a) SETS the Council Tax for Wyre Forest District Council on a Band D Property at £243.29 for 2024-2025 which represents an increase of 3% on Council Tax from 2023-2024.
 - b) ENDORSES the provisional Council Tax on a Band D Property in 2025-2026 of £250.58 and £258.09 in 2026-2027, being increases of 3%.
- 1.2.3 NOTED the Head of Resources (as Chief Financial Officer) opinion on the budget proposals, recommended by the Cabinet in the report, as detailed in Appendix 4 of the report.

C.127 Council Tax Setting 2024-25

Council considered the formal resolution for setting the Council Tax for 2024-25.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval. He said the resolution recommended a council tax (Band D equivalent) of £243.29 be set, an increase of 2.997%; which is below the maximum level permitted and a referendum in respect of this Council's element of council tax was not required.

Councillor S Miah left the meeting at 7.46pm

The Leader seconded the recommendations.

A named vote on the Council Tax resolution was recorded as follows and was agreed:

For (28)

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

Against (0)

Abstained (3)

Councillors: L Carroll, J Griffiths and M McDonnell

Decision: Council APPROVED the formal Council Tax Resolution 2024-25 at Appendix 1 of the report, taking into account information contained in Appendices 2 to 5.

C.128

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

(a) Recommendation from the Treasury Management Review Panel – 29 January 2024

Treasury Management Strategy 2024-25

The Chairman of the Review Panel, Councillor C Rogers presented the recommendations and formally moved them for approval.

Councillor D Ross seconded the proposals.

Upon a vote, the proposals were unanimously agreed.

Decision: Council;

- 1.1 APPROVED the restated Prudential Indicators and Limits for the financial years 2024-25 to 2033-34, along with the Liability Benchmark, included in Appendix 3 of the report.**
- 1.2 APPROVED the updated Treasury Management and Investment Policy and Strategy Statements for the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025 (the associated Prudential Indicators are included in Appendix 3 and the detailed criteria is included in Section 10 and Appendix 5).**
- 1.3 APPROVED the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement that sets out the Council’s policy on MRP included in Appendix 1.**
- 1.4 APPROVED the Authorised Limit Prudential Indicator included in Appendix 3.**
- 1.5 NOTED that the separate Capital Strategy 2024-34, to be approved separately by Council, sets out the policy statement covering non-treasury investments including the related suite of prudential indicators.**

C.129

Questions

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

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

Could the Cabinet Member tell me what steps are being taken to increase the Recycling Rate in Wyre Forest?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

We are increasing our recycling rates by using a 3-pronged approach. We

Agenda Item No. 10

are improving our social media communication, increasing resident education around contamination and by ensuring we keep recycling simple by continuing to use the commingling method of collection.

Supplementary Question

We cannot make it compulsory for residents to purchase green and black bins. I was rather surprised the other week to hear a house had been empty for 3 years, the bins had disappeared, a new resident buys it and is charged for his black bin and his green bin. Are we absolutely certain that charging in this way will actually encourage recycling? The gentleman in question said to me, "you know I don't have to buy a recycling bin, the council is encouraging me to possibly act antisocially". Please could you look again at that particular policy when it comes to a house that has been empty for some time and the bins which were there have disappeared?

Supplementary Answer

If you want to send me the information over, I am very happy to look into that with the officers.

2. Question from Councillor L Carroll to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio

In March 2023, the percentage of Wyre Forest District Council employees that were disabled was 1.22%, what is it now?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio

The answer is 1.22% the same as last year.

Supplementary Question

Currently in the Wyre Forest there is 7.9% of the population are registered disabled, including myself. What has the Cabinet member done personally to ensure that more disabled people are working for the district, especially as the need for a diverse work force?

Supplementary Answer

Well personally, you realise that the appointment of staff is an officer function not a function of an elected member. But notwithstanding that, we can only employ those people that come forward for employment when we advertise for such and furthermore of course not everybody does declare a disability. So last year we had in our recruitment 667 applications for employment, of which 42 people declared a disability and 11 of those were interviewed. So we do look carefully at all kinds of disabilities and protected characteristics and should somebody with a disability or protected characteristic seek and gain employment with this council, then this council I can assure you will do everything that is reasonably practicable to ensure that person is accommodated with this employment.

C.130

Motions Submitted under Standing Orders

No motions were received by the deadline.

C.131 Emergency Motions submitted under Standing Orders

There were no emergency motions.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 7.53pm.

The meeting is available for viewing on the Council's website.

<https://wyreforestdc.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcasts>