

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY,  
KIDDERMINSTER

15 MAY 2024 (6PM)

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**Present:**

Councillors: C Rogers (Chairman), J F Byng (Vice-Chairman), B Brookes, L Carroll, V Caulfield, G Connolly, N J Desmond, R Drew, P Dyke, K Gale, N Gale, J Griffiths, I Hardiman, P Harrison, M J Hart, K Henderson, D Little, N Martin, 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.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and paid tribute to Louise Edginton and Alan Totty, former Councillors who had both died recently. A minute's silence was observed.

**C.01 Prayers**

Prayers were said by Deacon Becky Lovatt of Wesley Methodist, Stourport & Alveley and Callow Hill and Areley Kings Methodist Churches.

The Chairman then invited the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group to say a few words in tribute to former Councillors Louise Edginton and Alan Totty.

**C.02 Election of Chairman**

Councillor J Byng was nominated as Chairman. This was moved by Councillor M Hart and seconded by Councillor B Brookes.

**Decision: Councillor J Byng be elected as Chairman of the Council for the municipal year 2024-25.**

Councillor N Wilson joined the meeting at 6.15pm

**C.03 Chairman – Investiture and Declaration of Acceptance of Office**

After being invested with his Chain of Office, Councillor J Byng made his Declaration of Acceptance of Office as Chairman.

**C.04 Chairman's Response**

The Chairman thanked members for his appointment, for which he was

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grateful and proud. He added that he would strive to represent the district to the best of his ability. He announced that his chosen charity for the municipal year is the British Heart Foundation, and he will endeavour to raise as much money as possible for them.

### **C.05 Retiring Chairman**

On behalf of the Council and political groups, Conservative Group, Councillor M Hart; Independent and Green Group, Councillor M Rayner; and Liberal Democrat Group, Councillor F Oborski MBE, thanked the retiring Chairman for his contribution to the role during his term of office.

### **C.06 Election of Vice-Chairman**

Councillor M Hart nominated Councillor P Harrison as Vice-Chairman. This was seconded by Councillor B Brookes.

**Decision: Councillor P Harrison be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Council for the municipal year 2023-2024.**

### **C.07 Vice-Chairman – Investiture and Declaration of Acceptance of Office**

After being invested with his Badge of Office, Councillor P Harrison made his Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

### **C.08 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: J Aston, E Bourne, H E Dyke and M McDonnell.

### **C.09 Declarations of Interests by Members**

No declarations of interest were made.

### **C.10 Minutes**

**Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

### **C.11 Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

### **C.12 Chairman's Communications**

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

### **C.13 Leader of the Council Announcements**

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The Leader of the Council stated that, recently, he was pleased to announce the appointment of Councillor B Brookes as Deputy Leader. He also thanked Councillor I Hardiman who had served as Deputy Group Leader for 9 years, and as Deputy Leader of the Council for 5 of those years. There were no changes to Cabinet portfolios. He outlined ongoing work towards the Local Government Association's Peer Review Action Plan including continued progress on the economic regeneration and other capital projects in Kidderminster town centre.

A copy of the announcements is available for viewing on the Council's website:

[http://www.wyreforest.gov.uk/council/docs/doc59454\\_20240515\\_council\\_report.pdf](http://www.wyreforest.gov.uk/council/docs/doc59454_20240515_council_report.pdf)

### **C.14 Political and Constitutional Structures 2024/2025**

Council considered a report from the Solicitor to the Council on the proposed political and constitutional structures for the municipal year 2024/25.

The Leader presented the report and formally moved the full suite of recommendations, as set out in the report, for approval. Councillor B Brookes seconded the proposals. Councillor F Oborski fully supported the proposals and emphasised the importance of the Corporate Parenting training.

#### **Decision: Council:**

- 2.1 Agreed the revisions to the Constitution as set out in section 4 and Appendix 1.**
- 2.2 Approved the proposed Political Management Structure of committees for 2024/2025 as set out in Appendix 2.**
- 2.3 Agreed the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees as contained in Appendix 3.**
- 2.4 Adopted the Municipal Calendar as set out in Appendix 4.**
- 2.5 Agreed the appointments to outside bodies as set out in Appendix 5.**
- 2.6 Authorised the Solicitor to the Council to settle any outstanding details relating to the political structures and to make changes as necessary to the Council's Constitution to give effect to the Council's decisions and any other revisions necessary to reflect needs or circumstances.**

### **C.15 Members' Annual Activity Reports and Attendance 2023-2024**

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Council received the schedule of Members' Annual Reports giving details of their activities in their role as District Councillors for the 2023-2024 municipal year and a record of Members' attendance for the 2023-2024 municipal year. Councillor F Oborski commented that the reduced attendance figures for 2 serving councillors due to serious illness could be misunderstood by members of the public and requested that, in future, an asterisk and note is added to the report to indicate these circumstances. The Leader agreed that this would be looked into.

**Decision: The reports and attendance be noted.**

### **C.16 Annual Reports for the Municipal Year 2023-2024**

- (a) Cabinet**
- (b) Overview & Scrutiny Committee**
- (c) Ethics & Standards Committee**

Council received the annual reports from the Leader of the Council, and the Chairmen of both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Ethics and Standards Committee.

**Decision: The annual reports for Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Ethics & Standards Committee be noted.**

### **C.17 Community Governance Review: Wolverley and Cookley**

The Council received a report from the Chief Executive and was asked to agree various matters relating to the community governance review of Wolverley and Cookley, which is to commence on 1 August 2024.

The Leader formally moved the recommendations for approval and Councillor B Brookes seconded the proposals. Councillor R Drew, as Chairman of Wolverley and Cookley Parish Council, confirmed that the Parish Councillors agreed to undertake and ask WFDC to complete its Community Governance Review and urged Council to approve the recommendations.

**Decision: Council APPROVED:**

- 2.1 the terms of reference for the review in Appendix 1 and to delegate to the Chief Executive (in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Solicitor to the Council) power to make any amendments that may be necessary in light of the Boundary Commission's final recommendations for electoral arrangements of Worcestershire County Council so far as they affect Wolverley and Cookley;**
- 2.2 the questions to be asked in the local advisory poll on 1 May 2025 under section 116 of the Local Government Act 2003,**

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**together with the franchise and other procedural rules for the local poll, set out in Appendix 2;**

- 2.3 the Returning Officer (as counting officer) be given delegated authority, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to supplement the rules for the advisory poll as set out in rule 12 in Appendix 2.**

**C.18 Senior management structure and approval of updated pay policy statement**

The Council received a report from the Chief Executive, which requested it formally approve changes to the senior management structure and approve the updated pay policy statement.

The Leader commended the proposal on behalf of the Council to the Chamber and reiterated that the changes are vital for the people and businesses we serve in order to deliver on the Corporate Plan. Councillor B Brookes seconded the proposals. Two councillors took the opportunity to raise questions and the Leader responded.

**Decision: Council:**

- 2.6 DECIDED that the senior management structure should change with effect from 1 July 2024 as set out in this report, including the amendments to section 18: Management Structure of the Council's Constitution and to section 12: Contracts Procedure Rules;**
- 2.7 ADOPTED the revised pay policy statement in Appendix 1.**

**C.19 Policy And Budget Framework – Matters which require a decision by Council**

**Recommendations from the Cabinet - 7 May 2024**

**Future High Streets Fund project**

Council received a report from the Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and the Green Agenda and he referred members to the related reports and documents, which had already been distributed via the exempt Cabinet agenda pack. Councillor Morehead moved the recommendation for approval, and he reasserted that the entire funding allocation is from grants and not at a cost to the Council. The Leader formally seconded the proposals.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio endorsed the proposal.

**Decision: Council AGREED that:**

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**The capital programme allocation for the Future High Streets Fund is amended by the amount as set out in the confidential report in respect of additional project works and costs, on the basis of the funding arrangements set out in section 5 and with authority delegated to the Head of Resources to decide on any temporary financing arrangements that may be necessary. The total additional allocation of the amount as set out in the confidential report is to be funded from grants arising from the former Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.**

#### **C.20**

#### **Questions**

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

#### **1. Question from Councillor J Griffiths to the Leader of the Council.**

Can an update be given on progress of the Corporate Plan objectives?

#### **Answer from Councillor Marcus Hart, Leader of the Council.**

We unanimously approved our Corporate Plan objectives and our three priorities; economic growth and regeneration, securing financial sustainability for services that local communities value, and a clean, safe and green place to live, work and visit.

We are making great progress. - I accept Councillor Griffiths you didn't vote to fund the corporate priorities that this Council unanimously endorsed last autumn, but nevertheless extra litter pickers to name but one, and indeed allocations for ensuring that the district is clean, safe and looking good. Decisions already about electric vehicle charging points, action not words, approximately 140 electric vehicle charging points in our carparks are going to be rolled out. There was a priority to plant up to 10,000 trees throughout the life time of this council, that's on my maths, about 2,500 trees a year and I'm told that we have already reached our target of 2,500 throughout this year. We have just taken a decision, which you very kindly supported, in respect of the changes to our senior management structure, creating a Corporate Director who has responsibility for commercialisation and regeneration. And indeed you very kindly just supported a decision to amend our capital programme to ensure that one of our key regeneration projects gets the funding to ensure that it is delivered. So, we are making great progress on our Corporate Plan, and can I invite you to put this question to me at each and every meeting going forward, and I'll tell you even more good news?

#### **Supplementary question.**

I'm glad that you have offered to give us an update at each and every council meeting because that saves me asking the question, can we just have it as a standing agenda item?

#### **Answer from Councillor Marcus Hart, Leader of the Council.**

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I've got power, but I haven't got that much power, and of course I'll talk nicely to the Chairman of the Council, but I can't promise he will do that, and I look forward to you holding me to account in the usual way for the lifetime of this council.

### **2. Question from Councillor J Griffiths to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio.**

Has there been any communication to Wyre Forest residents on WFDC's direct response to feedback received from the online budget consultation which took place earlier this year?

### **Answer from Councillor David Ross, Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio.**

The feedback received from the residents as a result of the budget consultation, which you will recall was launched on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December, for a four-week period, running until the 18<sup>th</sup> of January this year. 976 responses were received which was an excellent response rate and I think it was the highest for a number of years, and all the questions, bar one, there were more people who strongly supported the Cabinet budget proposals, which of course is what the survey was about, than those that strongly opposed them. Now the responses were discussed in detail at the Strategic Review Panel, of course you were present at that particular panel yourself. Now I accept that is an exempt meeting and not open to the public, but notwithstanding, the Cabinet meeting which happened on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February of this year which is open to the public, and indeed which was webcast so members of the public could log into it or could be present in the Chamber, were able to come and hear the responses discussed in detail, and of course furthermore, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February this year at the budget setting meeting they were again discussed in further detail.

### **Supplementary question.**

I fully accept that the high-level ones were communicated, it's more we had over 300 comments, and I'm not expecting you to respond to each and every one of 300 questions. There were themes emerging and we also talked at the budget meeting about Community Leadership Funding which the online consultation didn't support, but the view was we should go forward with that, but we could also do some communication around explaining better to our people about what it's about and how it works. So, I think we also did agree, I thought, that we would look at the themes running through those individual comments to see what were the themes emerging, and say thank you, this is what you said or this is what you did. You had 323 individual comments.

So, my question is, we haven't responded as we thought we would to that, have we missed the boat in other words to actually deal with the questions that were coming into us?

### **Answer from Councillor David Ross, Cabinet Member for Finance and**

**Capital Portfolio.**

The method of responding to the survey is one that has been the method of this council for many years and by the previous administration. There was no change, we don't suddenly decide to alter the methodology of how we respond. I do think that, whilst I take on board, that there were 300 odd responses and some questions were supporting and some weren't, notwithstanding, each question and each response were summated by the officers. It was quite a task to do all that and from that then we were able to determine those questions, those responses that received the most support. I'm not quite sure, apart from individual replying to each particular person, what more we could do.

**C.21 Motions Submitted Under Standing Order No. D1 (1)**

The following notice of motion were received in accordance with Standing Order D1(1):

- 1. Notice of Motion from Councillor M Hart to celebrate the Golden Anniversary, which was marked on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 of Wyre Forest District Council assuming its wide range of duties and responsibilities in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 and the many achievements by the Council since its creation; and to pay tribute to those who have served the Council over the last 50 years, whether as elected members or as officers.**

Councillor M Hart presented the motion, paying particular tribute to Councillor Fran Oborski MBE, who has served on the Council for all of those 50 years, as well as to all members and officers who have served during that time. The motion was seconded by Councillor M Rayner, who echoed the Leader's words and delivered a vote of thanks.

Councillor F Oborski responded to the motion and reflected on the beginnings of the Council in 1974, making mention of Alderman Mike Kelly, who was also a member at the beginning. Other members highlighted the work, and changes, in the district that the Council have overseen during that time and supported the words of the previous speakers.

The motion was unanimously agreed.

A presentation of a bouquet of flowers was then made to Councillor Fran Oborski, in recognition of her service.

**C.22 Urgent Motions Submitted Under Standing Order No. D1 (7)**

There were no emergency motions.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 7.30pm.

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



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