

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC CENTRE, STOURPORT-ON-SEVERN

20TH SEPTEMBER 2006 (6.00PM)

PRESENT:

Councillors: J W Dudley (Chairman), J C Simmonds (Vice-Chairman), J Aston, Mrs M H Baillie, J Baker, G W Ballinger, J-P Champion, S J M Clee, N J Desmond, Mrs H E Dyke, P Dyke, Mrs L Edginton, G H Eeles, Mrs J Fairbrother-Millis, B T Glass, P B Harrison, M J Hart, Mrs P V Hayward, Mrs S M Hayward, M A W Hazlewood, Mrs A T Hingley, J Holden, W G Jones, Mrs R L Lewis, H J Martin, Miss M A Mason, C D Nicholls, Mrs F M Oborski, M M G Oborski, Mrs J L Salter, M A Salter, J A Shaw, M J Shellie, D R Sheppard, K J Stokes, N J Thomas, R Wheway, S J Williams, G C Yarranton.

C.44 PRAYERS

Prayers were said by the Reverend Keith Judson, Bewdley Baptist Church.

C.45 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Mrs L Hyde, M B Kelly and Miss S C Meekings and Honorary Alderman Mrs G E Mills.

C.46 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor M J Shellie declared a personal interest in the question that he had asked (number four) at Minute No. C.48 below, as detailed in Appendix 1 to these minutes, in view of being a representative of the Council on the Community Housing Group.

C.47 MINUTES

DECISION:

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th July 2006 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the correction of the spelling of Councillor M M G Oborski's name on page 12, Appendix 1.

C.48 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No members of the public had given notice to speak in accordance with the Council's scheme for public participation at meetings of full Council.

C.49 **QUESTIONS**

The Council received a report setting out a range of questions from Councillors G H Eeles, Mrs J Fairbrother-Millis, H J Martin, M J Shellie and N J Thomas, directed at the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Members. The questions and answers are set out in full in Appendix 1 (attached).

C.50 **CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS**

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

In an update to the published list, the Chairman advised that Kidderminster Heritage Day, scheduled for 9th September 2006, had been postponed and that he had been unable to attend Bromsgrove District Council's Civic Service on 17th September 2006. He had attended a National Health Service showcase in Kidderminster for people with long-term illnesses. He had also been an unofficial observer at the sponsored abseil in aid of Kemp House Hospice, Kidderminster, at which two District Councillors had raised more than £400. He congratulated Councillors M J Shellie and G C Yarranton who had been participants.

The Chairman informed the Council that he had recently visited Honorary Alderman Councillor Mrs G E Mills in the Woodlands nursing home, Kidderminster, where she was convalescing. He was pleased to report that she was feeling much better and looking forward to going home in a week or two.

He passed on Councillor Mrs Mills' thanks to Councillors and officers for the cards and well wishes that they had sent her.

C.51 **LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS AND REPORT**

The Leader of the Council made no announcements.

C.52 POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK – MATTERS WHICH REQUIRE A DECISION BY COUNCIL

Recommendations from the Cabinet - 24th August 2006

Older People's Strategy For Worcestershire

The Council considered a recommendation from the Cabinet, which sought approval for an Older People's Strategy for Worcestershire. The Strategy had been developed through joint working to provide a "whole systems" approach to the needs of older people residing in the County.

DECISION:

The Older People's Strategy for Worcestershire, as referred to in the report to the Cabinet on 24th August 2006, be adopted.

C.53 REPORT FROM THE CABINET SCRUTINY CHAIRMAN

The Council considered a report from the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee Chairman which gave an update on scrutiny issues.

DECISION:

The Cabinet Scrutiny Chairman's report on scrutiny issues be noted.

C54 MOTION SUBMITTED UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. D1 (1)

Streetscene and Townscape, Kidderminster and Stourport

The Council considered the following motion which had been submitted by Councillor J A Shaw on behalf of the Labour Group:

"Council,

Cognisant of the results of the Worcestershire Visitor Survey 2005, which rated Kidderminster the poorest town in the county in the categories "upkeep" and "litter clearance", and rated Stourport second worst for litter clearance,

acknowledging that Worcestershire County Council under-performs significantly in its duty to maintain the appearance of its infrastructure in Kidderminster and Stourport town centres,

and accepting that the 2006/07 Corporate Plan priority "Keeping public spaces clean" is not being achieved in the centres of Kidderminster and Stourport,

resolves

1. to join the Local Government Association's "Reputation of Local Government" campaign, as one means by which it can learn from other authorities how to improve performance,
2. to improve partnership working with the County Council,
3. to lobby the County Council to improve its maintenance provision in Kidderminster and Stourport town centres,
4. to carry out an audit of Kidderminster town centre in order to create an "upkeep" priority list applicable to both public and private sectors, and
5. to give serious consideration to increasing resources for litter clearance in the 2007/08 budget."

Members proposing the motion acknowledged that there had been improvements in the standard of cleanliness of the street scene in the District, but felt strongly that more needed to be done. They were concerned about litter, weeds and unkempt grass areas etc., which created a poor impression, as reflected in the visitor survey. However, they stressed that this was a matter of resources and not a criticism of staff, who were providing an excellent service, particularly the blitz crew. It was suggested that members who were also county councillors could use their influence in relation to highway issues that were the County Council's responsibility.

Speaking in support of the motion, the Cabinet Member for Commercial Services reported on the significant provision that had been made in the Council's budgets over the past two municipal years for street cleansing, litter clearance and weeding. This had resulted in a range of improvements including more litter bins, more street scene staff and an increase in the days per week worked from five to seven. In addition, a policy was being drawn up to seek private company sponsorship of floral displays on traffic islands and a number of parties were already interested.

He endorsed the proposal to join the Local Government Association's "Reputation of Local Government" campaign, advising that this would be in line with the Council's branding strategy which had been approved by the Cabinet in July 2006. He supported the proposal to improve partnership working with the County Council and had already lobbied the County to fulfil its responsibilities. Regarding the proposed audit of Kidderminster Town Centre, he pointed out that the Council already audited benches and bollards in terms of a priority list.

He confirmed that the Administration would give consideration at budget time to increasing resources for litter clearance. This point was endorsed

by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Affairs.

The Council supported the motion. Although there had been an improvement since the Worcestershire Visitor Survey had been published, Members were aware that there was still a problem with litter and they highlighted various locations in the District to illustrate the point. Concerns raised by the Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership were also mentioned. Attention was drawn to improvements to the street scene created by floral displays and potential funding of them by town and parish councils and local traders, as revealed by a recent scrutiny exercise. Reference was made to the Council's former "Pride in your Area" campaign, and the continuing need for education about litter. There was also a reference to joint measures with the Foley Park Pathfinder Group and other community groups in relation to raising awareness over litter.

At the conclusion of the debate the motion was approved.

DECISION:

The motion, as detailed in the above preamble to this minute, be approved.

C.55 URGENT MOTIONS SUBMITTED UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. D1 (7)

Dogs in St George's Park and Baxter Gardens Park, Kidderminster

DECISION:

In accordance with Standing Order D1(5), the following urgent motion, submitted under Standing Order D1(7), be referred for consideration at the next appropriate meeting of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee:

"In view of the problems being caused to parents of young children by dogs "off the lead" in St. George's Park and Baxter Gardens Park, Council agrees to implement "no dogs off leads" orders in these two parks."

C.56 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

DECISION:

Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business, on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of "exempt information" as defined in paragraphs 3 and 6 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

C.57 **SUMMARY OF MINUTES**

The following proceedings were considered after the press and public had been excluded from the meeting. A summary of the minutes relating to these items has been made as 'Exempt Information' would be disclosed if the minutes were published in full.

C.58 **POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK – MATTERS WHICH REQUIRE A DECISION BY COUNCIL****Recommendations from the Cabinet – 24th August 2006****Use of Compulsory Purchase Powers.**

The Council approved arrangements for the use of compulsory purchase powers to acquire two properties.

C.59 **REDEVELOPMENT OF WORCESTER STREET, KIDDERMINSTER (KTC3)**

The Council appointed a preferred development partner for the redevelopment of the site known as “KTC3” in Worcester Street, Kidderminster.

The meeting ended at 7.50 p.m.

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
COUNCIL MEETING – 20th SEPTEMBER 2006

AGENDA ITEM NO. 6

QUESTION TIME AT COUNCIL MEETINGS - STANDING ORDER A5

Questions from Councillor H J Martin

To the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Affairs

1. Can the Cabinet Member please advise when the delayed Town Hall Hub development will be open to the public?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Affairs

The public opening of the Hub will take place on 14th November 2006. The telephone side of the Hub will be in place shortly afterwards.

Supplementary Question from Councillor H J Martin

In view of the delayed opening, has the original budget been exceeded and, if so, by how much?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Affairs

Councillor Martin was at the Efficiency Policy Panel when a detailed presentation was given and the different stages gone through. It is a difficult project because the Town Hall is a listed building. There is no foundation in the floor as it is built on dirt. There are difficulties with access through the arch which adjoins public space. Hence it is not an easy project to administer. Therefore a professional project manager has been employed. Mr Dickens will manage our involvement carefully and keep an eye on costs. The project is not finished yet. Part of it involves a contract with a main builder, which includes a performance element in relation to completion times. The contract is not yet concluded so I cannot give a direct answer to your question.

To the Cabinet Member for Planning, Health and Environment

2. How is the Council planning for the Disability Equality Scheme, which is a forthcoming requirement introduced by Central Government?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Planning, Health and Environment

I wish to pass this question to my colleague Councillor Campion within whose portfolio it falls.

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Affairs

It was agreed at a recent Group Leaders' meeting that I would be the Administration's Diversity and Equality Champion. Those of you who have already received the Cabinet agenda will see the draft scheme that is going to Cabinet. The Chief Executive is leading a special Diversity and Equality Group, which covers all areas of the Council's services, and I receive the Group's minutes. I am sure that, if other political groups have a Diversity and Equality Champion, they could receive the minutes or attend the meetings. I am sure that the Chief Executive would welcome their input.

Supplementary Question from Councillor H J Martin

Thank you for your response. I still do not get all electronic information. As you are aware the scheme is due to be in place in December this year. How and when will consultation take place? I am sure you will tell me that it is in the report but I don't have it.

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Affairs

We are pre-empting a decision of the Cabinet, but the idea is for extensive consultation involving wide and varied consultation groups, members and staff in what is a staff led issue. I was not aware that you are not on email, so I will arrange for you to receive a hard copy of the report.

To the Leader of the Council

3. In view of the nature and impact of current proposals for the Revenues and Benefits Division, will the Leader agree to call a full, all Members' briefing and discussion well in advance of Full Council on 15th November?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

Answer is "no" Councillor Martin. However, you yourself sit on the Task and Finish Group which is looking at Shared Services for Revenues and Benefits. Members with an interest in the matter could be invited to attend.

Supplementary Question from Councillor H J Martin

Would the Leader agree that the qualities required in a Leader are statesmanship and diplomacy? Your response does not address the issues that concern all 42 Members of the Council, who need to be briefed on a matter as important as this because of the implications for staff and services.

Answer from the Leader of the Council

The answer is still "no", but I will ensure that a briefing note is circulated to all members of Council in view of your comments.

Questions from Councillor M J Shellie**To the Cabinet Member for Planning, Health and Environment**

4. **There is a need to provide significant social housing in the District over the next five years to meet existing targets. What action is the Council taking to achieve this?**

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Planning, Health and Environment

Affordable housing continues to be of paramount importance to this Council. The number one priority is to meet the Housing Strategy for 2004/07 when a target of 120 affordable housing units was set. I am pleased to say the target has been exceeded this year and new targets will be set post 2007.

Through the Council's partnership and strategic work, a further £6 million has been negotiated through housing associations to build 160 new units up to 2008.

Supplementary Question from Councillor M J Shellie

I thank you for answer and welcome the news of new houses. Can you assure me that the £10m that the authority has ring-fenced in the bank for social housing will remain ring fenced?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Planning, Health and Environment

My understanding is that there are no changes proposed for that fund.

To the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services

5. **Can the Cabinet Member please advise when the long promised and eagerly awaited changing rooms planned for White Wickets will be completed?**

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services

I am delighted to advise the Council tonight that, due to the Administration's commitment, it will be completed by 1st December 2006. Obviously it has taken a little longer than expected, but the key thing is getting the project right and getting good value for money. We have put in extra money to provide changing rooms that football teams will want. At every stage there has been full and frank consultation with all teams. They were all unanimously prepared to wait a little longer to get the best facility possible.

I would like to make clear that these changing rooms were not left to go to rack and ruin over just the last five months, but over many years. I had the misfortune to get changed in those changing rooms on a wet November morning and I returned to find, due to a hole in the roof, all my clothes soaking wet. So let's not pretend they went to rack and ruin over last few months. The money allocated by this Administration will make a

difference.

Supplementary Question from Councillor M J Shellie

Does the Cabinet member agree with me that the amount of money being put into the changing rooms is the amount of money proposed in the budget four years ago and gradually increased year on year?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services

Any administration can put a service option forward, but a good administration delivers and improves services. We put in £140,000. You put in £120,000. This was for White Wickets and Habberley changing rooms. We are having brand new changing rooms which will last for 25 years plus. Your scheme was not sustainable. It was a cheap makeover involving re-cladding and repainting. Ours is value for money that will be there for the long term.

Question from Councillor G H Eeles

To the Cabinet Member for Planning, Health and Environment

6. In view of the potential impact on local residents, is the Cabinet Member content with the revised arrangements for bus transport from Kidderminster to Redditch and Worcester Hospitals?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Planning, Health and Environment

I have no doubt that passengers will be inconvenienced by changes which I understand are the result of the withdrawal of the PCT subsidy. First Bus will only pick up commercially viable services. Worcestershire County Council has stepped in with a subsidy using other providers to manage routes wherever possible.

Supplementary Question from Councillor G H Eeles

Is the Cabinet Member aware of whether any representations have been made to the Trust or bus companies to alter this terrible arrangement?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Planning, Health and Environment

Yes. When the PCT arrangements are known, representations will be made for the reinstatement of the subsidy. A bid has been made by Worcestershire County Council under the Community Transport Scheme for North Worcestershire to fill the gap in services.

Question from Councillor N J Thomas**To the Cabinet Member for Commercial Services**

7. **Is the Taxi Testing facility at Green Street, MOT Approved for Group 4 testing, and what is the running cost of this service to Council?**

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Commercial Services

In answer to your question, a short "no" and "nothing".

Supplementary Question from Councillor N J Thomas

Would it be good idea to make the facility up to the Group 4 standard, allow the public to come and have MOT's and get an income?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Commercial Services

No it would not be a good idea for Green Street to go to the Group 4 standard to provide MOT's for the public. MOTs are not done there in any event. A great proportion of the fleet are HGVs and their MOT's are done by Vosa. Others go to appropriate MOT testing companies. There are no plans to open the depot at Green Street for members of the public. There would be huge service and revenue implications.

Question from Councillor Mrs J Fairbrother-Millis**To the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services**

8. **In view of the recent press statements concerning the proposed skatepark site in Stourport, would the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services please clarify his intentions.**

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services

I am delighted to reaffirm my position on this particular issue. All members will know that skateboarding formed part of a detailed report from a Task and Finish Group comprising representatives of all parties in the chamber tonight, one of whom was a prominent Stourport Councillor. The Group looked at a range of issues, one of which was the exact location in Stourport. A decision was not reached lightly. Months were spent deliberating and looking at all the evidence.

I agree with the conclusion that Stourport Riverside is, on balance, the best location. Other locations are not satisfactory due to the proximity of houses. In my opinion and that of the Task and Finish Group, the Old Beams site is not satisfactory for two clear reasons. Firstly, it is too close to a permanent caravan park and, secondly, it acts as an overflow car park and is busy during events, such as the Stourport Carnival. Furthermore, the site at Riverside is supported by the Police because they can patrol

and monitor it, whereas access is difficult behind the public house. There has been consultation, for example, with the Youth Strategy Skateboarding Sub-Group, chaired by Councillor Mrs F M Oborski. This group is happy with the proposed location and, furthermore, the proposal has been through the committee process including the former Commercial Services Policy and Scrutiny Panel, the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet and no Councillor raised problems with the location. It may not be an ideal location, but if we are to provide more facilities for youth it is, on balance, the right location and we will go ahead with it.

Response from Councillor Mrs J Fairbrother-Millis

I should like to thank the Cabinet member for his open and frank statement, particularly in the light of the statement of the Councillor for Mitton when he chaired the meeting that recommended approval of the site.