

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

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

28TH NOVEMBER 2007 (6.00PM)

PRESENT:

Councillors: Mrs R L Akathiotis, J Aston, J Baker, G W Ballinger, J-P Campion, S J M Clee, Mrs H E Dyke, P Dyke, Mrs L Edginton, G H Eeles, B T Glass, Mrs J Greener, P B Harrison, M J Hart, Mrs P V Hayward, Mrs S M Hayward, M A W Hazlewood, Mrs A T Hingley, J Holden, Mrs L Hyde, W G Jones, M B Kelly, H J Martin, Miss S C Meekings, D J Millis, C D Nicholls, Mrs F M Oborski, Ms T L Onslow, M Price, M A Salter, M J Shellie, D R Sheppard, J C Simmonds, K J Stokes, J Thomas, N J Thomas, R Wheway, S J Williams and G C Yarranton.

C.60

PRAYERS

Prayers were said by Captain Glenis Bonsell of the Salvation Army.

C.61

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors N J Desmond, Mrs J Fairbrother-Millis and Miss M Mason.

C.62

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillors Mrs F M Oborski, M J Shellie and S J Williams declared a personal interest in agenda item number 10 (a) - Recommendations from the Cabinet 27th September 2007 - The Worcestershire County Homelessness Strategy, due to their membership of the Community Housing Group's Board.

C.63

MINUTES

DECISION:

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th September 2007 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

C.64

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No Members of the public had given notice to speak under the Council's Scheme of Public Speaking at Full Council.

C.65 **QUESTIONS**

The Council received a report setting out a range of questions from Councillors Mrs R L Akathiotis, Mrs J Fairbrother-Millis, B T Glass, H J Martin, Mrs F M Oborski, N J Thomas and R Wheway directed at the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Members. The questions and answers are set out in full in Appendix 1 (attached).

C.66 **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 made the following announcements:

He reported that his Carol Service would be held on 14th December 2007 and he would like to see as many Members as possible attending this event. Wine and mince pies would be served following the service

He commented that the Scouts' Christmas postal service would be run again this year. This was a charity postal delivery service that the Scouts ran at Christmas that covered the areas of Wolverley, Blakedown, Kidderminster and Cookley.

C.67 **LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS AND REPORT**

The Leader of the Council made the following announcements:

(i) **New Printers**

The Council had installed new printers across the Council. This was an excellent development and would save the Council tens of thousands of pounds that could be spent on other services.

(ii) **Proposals for the Cemetery**

A Review Panel had considered the proposals for the new cemetery. The Leader was happy to report that the Panel's proposals had been endorsed by Cabinet and would now be considered as part of the budget process.

(iii) **New Chief Executive - Worcestershire County Council**

It was announced that Tricia Haines had been selected as Worcestershire County Council's new Chief Executive.

(iv) **Fair Trade Status - Kidderminster**

Kidderminster had been granted Fair Trade Status and this was perceived as a welcome move.

(v) New Toilets in Kidderminster

Progress was being made with regard to the provision of new toilets in Kidderminster.

C.68 LOCAL AREA AGREEMENTS

A presentation on Local Area Agreements was given by the Head of Community and Partnership Services. The presentation outlined what Local Area Agreements were and their implications for Wyre Forest District.

Following the presentation, questions were raised and the following points were noted:

1. Members would be kept abreast of progress with Local Area Agreements via an update in the Members' Information Bulletin.
2. Although many officers were working on themes that delivered services to communities, it would be necessary to ensure that this was recognised as there was core work for officers across the County to identify future funding through the Local Area Agreement.
3. The public would most definitely benefit from Local Area Agreements. £13 million would be coming for Local Area Agreements in the first year to be used on delivering improvement on identified priorities.
4. In response to a query as to whether all those involved in Local Area Agreements would be bringing money to the funding pot, the Head of Community and Partnership Services responded that this remained to be seen. Whether budgets would be pooled was an unknown entity. The Chief Executive commented that there was a statutory duty to co-operate with partners and he considered that, if partners did not co-operate, it might go against them in the new Comprehensive Area Assessment.

Councillor G H Eeles left the meeting at 7 pm during consideration of this item.

5. There was currently no guarantee that the work of Local Area Agreements would be fully resourced. Officers were currently involved in negotiations in detailing evidence of need and opportunity.
6. Concern was expressed by a member that if targets were not met through Local Area Agreements, money would not be forthcoming. The Chief Executive commented that the Worcestershire Partnership Management Group was responsible for looking at issues such as this.

DECISION:

The presentation be noted.

C.69

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

10 (a) Recommendations from the Cabinet - 27th September 2007

(i) Scheme of Voting Rights for Co-Opted Members

The Council considered recommendations from the Cabinet regarding the Scheme of Voting Rights for Co-Opted Members. The Local Government Act 2003 made provision for the Council to agree a scheme whereby co-opted members could be appointed to Scrutiny Committees and be given voting rights.

A debate ensued on the merits of the proposal and, in conclusion, Members endorsed the recommendation below:

DECISION:

- 1. The Scheme for co-opted members to have voting rights, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report to the Cabinet on 27th September 2007, be approved.**
- 2. Authority be delegated to the Scrutiny Committees to appoint co-opted members with voting rights in accordance with the Scheme, as and when they consider necessary.**

(ii) Data Quality Policy

The Council considered a recommendation from the Cabinet that recommended the adoption of a Data Quality Policy. The Policy would ensure that internal procedures and systems produced high quality data which could be relied upon to provide an accurate picture of Council performance.

DECISION:

The Data Quality Policy, attached to the report to Cabinet on 27th September 2007, be adopted with immediate effect.

(iii) New National Concessionary Bus Travel Scheme

The Council considered recommendations from Cabinet concerning the new national Concessionary Bus Travel Scheme, which took effect from 1st April 2008. The new scheme would enable over 60's and qualifying disabled persons to have free bus travel throughout England after 9.30 am

until 11.00 pm, Monday to Friday, and at any time on weekends and Bank Holidays.

DECISION:

1. **Following the Concessionary Travel Bill receiving Royal Assent on 19th July 2007, it be noted that a new national Concessionary Bus Travel Scheme will replace the current Wyre Forest concessionary Travel Scheme with effect from 1st April 2008.**
2. **The new statutory scheme be enhanced to include:-**
 - a) **Free travel at any time for journeys commencing within Worcestershire.**
 - b) **Companion passes for qualifying disabled persons for journeys commencing in Worcestershire.**
3. **Existing local arrangements in respect of Transport Tokens and Dial-a-Ride continue.**
4. **It be noted that the procurement and issue of the new National Bus Pass (smartcards) will be through a National Framework Agreement awarded following a Department of Transport bidding process. Worcestershire County Council will co-ordinate procurement on behalf of the Worcestershire Concessionary Travel Partnership.**

(iv) Review of the Provision of Sanitary Facilities

The Council considered recommendations from the Cabinet with regard to the review of the provision of sanitary facilities. It was noted that the British Standard for Sanitary provision had been revised and the adoption of the new British Standard would bring the Council into line with current best practice.

DECISION:

1. **Tables 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 of British Standard Sanitary Installations BS 6465 – 1:2006 Part 1, set out in Appendix 1 to the report to Cabinet, be adopted as the Council's standard for provision of sanitary facilities in premises where the Council has an enforcement role.**

2. **Authority be delegated to the Head of Planning, Health and Environment and the Environmental Health and Licensing Manager, in conjunction with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, to serve notices under Section 20 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 and to have discretion in the application of the British Standard in small premises holding less than 20 persons when it is deemed appropriate.**
3. **The Scheme of Delegation to Officers contained in the Council's Constitution be amended to include the delegation at 2 above.**

(v) The Worcestershire County Homelessness Strategy

The Council considered a recommendation from the Cabinet regarding the Worcestershire County Homelessness Strategy which had been developed through joint working by the District Housing Authorities and Registered Social Landlords within Worcestershire.

DECISION:

The Worcestershire County Homelessness Strategy, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report to Cabinet on 27th September 2007, be adopted.

(vi) Review of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licence Conditions Following Consultation on the Department for Transport's 'Best Practice Guide'

The Council considered a recommendation from the Cabinet that recommended changes to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licence Conditions for the District, following a consultation with stakeholders. The amended licensing conditions had been proposed following receipt of stakeholders' responses to a consultation.

DECISION:

The revised Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Licence Conditions for the District of Wyre Forest, as set out in Appendices 13 to 16 of the report to Cabinet on 27th September 2007, be adopted.

(vii) Progress on Brand Strategy

The Council considered recommendations from the Cabinet regarding the implementation of the Council's Brand Strategy.

DECISION:

1. **The proposed refreshed corporate identity, as set out in Appendix A to the briefing paper to the Corporate Service and Performance Scrutiny Committee on 18th September 2007, be approved for a phased implementation from 1st December 2007.**
2. **The Council sign up to the Local Government Association's Reputation Campaign, as detailed at Appendix B to the briefing paper to the Corporate Service and Performance Scrutiny Committee on 18th September 2007.**
3. **The Council host a Wyre Forest District Red Carpet Citizens' Award evening during 2008.**

10 (b) Recommendations from the Cabinet - 25th October 2007**(i) Public Participation at Meetings of Cabinet**

The Council considered recommendations from the Cabinet regarding extending the public speaking scheme that is currently operational for full Council to cover Cabinet meetings. It was perceived that extending the public speaking scheme to Cabinet meetings would promote democracy and inclusiveness and allow the electorate to have their say on issues that concerned them.

DECISION:

1. **The public speaking scheme that is currently operational for Full Council be extended to cover Cabinet meetings, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report to the Cabinet meeting on 25th October 2007.**
2. **The Council Procedure Rules in Part 4 of the Council's Constitution be amended accordingly.**

(c) Recommendations from the Cabinet - 22nd November 2007**(i) Benefits Service - Vision and Objectives and Benefits Service Strategy Updates**

The Council considered a recommendation from the Cabinet on the Benefit Service - Vision and Objectives and Benefit Service Strategy Updates. A review of these documents had been undertaken to ensure that they remained in line with good practice recommended by the Department of Work and Pensions.

DECISION:

The Vision and Objectives of the Benefits Service, attached as Appendix 1, and the Benefits Service Strategy attached as Appendix 2 of the report to Cabinet on 22nd November 2007, be endorsed.

(ii) Proposed Merger of North Worcestershire Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships

The Council considered a recommendation from the Cabinet regarding the benefits and efficiencies that would be gained by merging the Crime Disorder Reduction Partnerships for the local authority areas of Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest to create a North Worcestershire Crime Disorder Reduction Partnership. It was noted that Council was being asked to agree to the merger in principle and if the merger went ahead a full report would be made to the authority.

DECISION:

The Wyre Forest District Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership be formally merged with the CDRPs in Bromsgrove and Redditch to create a North Worcestershire CDRP, subject to robust consultation and engagement with Responsible Authorities and the ability to meet any additional financial implications within existing budgets that might be incurred in the short to medium term.

(iii) Statement of Licensing Policy (Licensing Act 2003) 2008 - 2011

The Council considered a recommendation from the Cabinet from its meeting on 22nd November 2007, regarding the Statement of Licensing Policy (Licensing Act 2003) 2008 – 2011. The Policy reflected Government Guidance published in June 2007 and offered clear guidance to applicants and objectors.

DECISION:

The draft Statement of Licensing Policy (in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003) (The Act) for the Wyre Forest District, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report to Cabinet on 22nd November 2006, be adopted as the Licensing Policy Statement for the period January 2008 – January 2011.

10(d) Recommendations from the Miscellaneous Functions Committee - 29th October 2007

Review of Polling District and Polling Places

The Council considered a recommendation regarding responses to a consultation exercise on the review of polling district and polling places which had been carried out in accordance with Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

The Chairman of the Miscellaneous Functions Committee presented the recommendation and commented that the Committee was happy to support the recommendation subject to a condition that a review of any schools affected by the Wyre Forest School Review be considered early in the New Year. She thanked the Acting Principal Elections Officer for holding a thorough consultation.

DECISION:

The Polling Districts and Polling Places within Wyre Forest District remain as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report to the Miscellaneous Functions Committee on 29th October 2007 .

C.70

MOTIONS SUBMITTED UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. D1 (1)

The following motion, submitted on behalf of the Liberal Group, was moved in view of the impact that waste plastic carrier bags had on the environment:

Plastic Carrier Bags

"Council acknowledges the international environmental impact of waste plastic carrier bags. Council also recognises the lead being taken by, amongst others, the London Boroughs and Brighton and Hove Council in seeking to prevent the issuing of free carrier bags by retailers.

Council therefore:

1. Congratulates those local retailers who are encouraging the use of "Plastic bags for Life" and cotton or jute shopping bags.
2. Urges local traders to sign up to a voluntary ban on the issue of free plastic carrier bags.
3. Resolves to campaign, through the Local Government Association, for a national ban on the issuing of free plastic carrier bags."

The Leader of the Liberal Group presented the motion. She acknowledged that she had referred to similar wording of a motion from Brighton and Hove

Council when preparing her motion. She congratulated a small town in Devon that had voted to become plastic bag free and had requested that paper bags be used instead. This idea had been discussed on several websites. She was concerned about the time plastic bags took to biodegrade and the impact that these bags had on wildlife. She told Members that some companies were promoting the use of jute shopping bags and 'bags for life.' She was aware that it would not be possible to ban plastic bags in Wyre Forest, but she hoped that the motion would be adopted and people would be encouraged to cut down on the use of free plastic bags, as they generally ended up as rubbish in wheelie bins.

She pointed out that plastic bags were made from oil and oil resources were finite and decreasing and were better used for fuel. She also wanted to approach the LGA for a total ban. If all authorities were to adopt this line it would give impetus to the proposed action. She alluded to the fact that Southern Ireland charged 10p for each bag used and this had resulted in a significant reduction in the use of plastic bags. Some stores were introducing strong paper carrier bags which were more environmentally friendly as they were recyclable. She asked the Council to support the motion.

The Council supported the motion and, in the course of the debate, two amendments were accepted. In the second point, the word "excessive" was inserted before the word "issue", and a fourth point was added to encourage the public to buy loose goods wherever this was a viable option.

DECISION:

The motion be approved subject to two amendments, as detailed in the preamble above, the final wording being as follows:

Council acknowledges the international environmental impact of waste plastic carrier bags. Council also recognises the lead being taken by, amongst others, the London Boroughs and Brighton and Hove Council in seeking to prevent the issuing of free carrier bags by retailers.

Council therefore:

- 1. Congratulates those local retailers who are encouraging the use of 'plastic bags for life' and cotton or jute shopping bags.**
- 2. Urges local traders to sign up to a voluntary ban on the excessive issue of free plastic carrier bags.**
- 3. Resolves to campaign, through the LGA, for a national ban on the issuing of free plastic carrier bags.**
- 4. Additionally, Council encourages individuals to buy loose goods instead of pre-packaged goods, wherever this is a viable option.**

C.71 **URGENT MOTIONS SUBMITTED UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. D1**
(7)

No notices of motion were received in accordance with Standing Order D1(1).

C.72 **APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO THE MIKE OBORSKI NO**
BARRIERS AWARD PANEL

Council considered the appointment of two members to sit on the Mike Oborski No Barriers Award Panel. This Panel had been set up in memory of the late Councillor Mike Oborski who had dedicated many years of service to the Council. The scheme would each year identify up to four local businesses, shops or local authorities/public agencies that had done something special to improve access to businesses or services for the disabled.

DECISION:

Councillors H J Martin and Mrs F M Oborski be nominated to serve on the Mike Oborski No Barriers Award Panel.

The meeting ended at 7.45 p.m.

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**COUNCIL MEETING - 28TH NOVEMBER 2007****AGENDA ITEM NO. 6****QUESTION TIME AT COUNCIL MEETINGS - STANDING ORDER A5****Questions from Councillor R. Wheway****To the Leader of Council**

1. In what ways is the Business Directory, recently circulated, to be used to encourage new and relocating businesses into the District?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

The Directory is intended to allow businesses to trade within the District and where possible, it is an opportunity for those outside the district to trade in the District. It is not 100% accurate because, of course, information is compiled by Berrows and they would have asked individual businesses and not all would wish to be included.

Supplementary Question from Councillor R Wheway

Would the Leader be hoping this would bring people from the South East out of the London conurbation to relocate?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

There is a broad mix here in Wyre Forest where we welcome everyone wherever they come from. We are looking to promote the town economically and to improve the town. If they want to come and play by our rules then they can come on board.

To the Leader of Council

2. Would the Leader agree with me that to meet the aim of encouraging "new and/or relocating companies and organisations" into Wyre Forest District then the information in a business directory should be helpful and accurate?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

I am sure Councillor Wheway knows something I am not aware of. There may be one spelling mistake if that counts. However we would aim for it to be as accurate as possible. If all Members were to read it that would be 42 more proof readers. The next version comes out in 18 months' time and we can make any amendments then.

Supplementary Question from Councillor R Wheway

Would the Leader agree that, if he is trying to bring people in, he should check his facts? If people want to come to the town from outside they will want to know about links to the town. The guide is deficient in that we know that the link to the M42 at Birmingham Airport is put at one hour away, whereas it is less than that. East Midlands Airport is one hour away, whereas you have to go past Birmingham to access that. Don't these issues need to be put right? There is no mention of Coventry. Even the railway links are not mentioned sufficiently. There are three main line links. Does he not agree with me that anyone wanting to come to Wyre Forest looking at this would think that the links are worse than they are and would be discouraged from coming?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

You make some excellent points which we will take on board. A document is never one hundred per cent accurate. We note your comments for the next version and are grateful to you for pointing them out.

Question from Councillor Mrs R. L. Akathiotis

To the Cabinet Member for Property and Operational Services

3. When "Wheelie Bins" are missed by our Refuse Crews they are later collected as an "extra" round.
 - a. Could the Cabinet Member please explain to me why this level of service cannot be extended to missed Recycling Boxes?
 - b. Does he agree with me that the current system of not offering an "extra" round for missed recycling boxes means that, for many families whose boxes are full when they are missed, the following week's recyclables end up having to go into the "wheelie bin"?
 - c. Will he investigate the possibility of providing "extra" back-up collections for missed recycling boxes?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Property and Operational Services

I will take questions (a), (b) and (c) as one question. In terms of the premises in question, this has to fit in with the refuse crews. It is not accurate to say that we provide an extra round and it is wrong to say that we offer an extended service that does not exist in any event for refuse boxes and bins.

In terms of (b) I do not agree that the current system means that recyclables can be left in wheelie bins, as opposed to boxes, and have no plans in respect of question (c) of extending the scheme to recycling bins when it does not exist in the first place.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Mrs R Akathiotis

I do know that the Council collects missed bins. It concerns me if we are telling the public how important it is to recycle and not giving recycling boxes the same priority as wheelie bins. It is a missed opportunity to show that we are taking recycling very seriously. The amount of rubbish in our recycling boxes can mount up. Therefore, it may be necessary to be put it in the wheelie bin because you have no facility to store this rubbish when you find out no one will be collecting your box. However I understand sometimes the crews will collect recyclables if they have the time.

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Property and Operational Services

I take on board what you have said in respect of your supplementary comments. The reason why we do collect missed wheelie bins is because of having a fortnightly collection service in Wyre Forest. We would be significantly criticised if we asked the public to put away their rubbish for a further two weeks because they had missed their slot. Furthermore, there is a capacity issue with missed wheelie bins and that is the reason why we collect them. We do not have in existence an extra round. In terms of good practice we encourage people to recycle as much as possible. Twenty eight per cent of rubbish is recycled and this is up by five per cent from three to four years ago. We do encourage recycling in this authority. If households are recycling a considerable amount, it is possible to be given two extra boxes as this authority wants to encourage recycling. If boxes are missed quite often people telephone and tell us that they have been missed and we tell them to put their boxes away until the next collection. If the box is full the following week we will take it. Our figures show that out of the thousands of recycling boxes in the district only 0.1% goes down as 'missed' which is an excellent record.

Questions from Councillor Mrs F. M. Oborski

To the Cabinet Member for Property and Operational Services

4. At the September meeting of Council I addressed a question to you, answered in your absence by the Leader of the Council, concerning the budgeted provision of water supplies to Council Allotment sites which did not have them. Could you now tell me on what date the provision of those agreed supplies was completed?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Property and Operational Service

I thank Councillor Mrs Oborski for the question that was asked at the last full Council meeting when unfortunately I was not here. In terms of this question, the works on the Cookley site and Chester Road site have not been completed and therefore I am unable to answer the question which has been put as to when they will be completed.

Supplementary question from Councillor Mrs F M Oborski

These were in the budget to be done in the current financial year. We are now eight months into that financial year. Is this a new sort of Council saving scheme whereby you put things in the budget and do not carry them out until the end of the financial year, therefore saving on expenditure?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Property and Operational Services

I can give an assurance, as someone who attends the annual allotments prize giving awards, that the work will be carried out. The difficulty is that, over the course of the last few months, staff have been involved with issues of flooding and they have been exceptionally busy. We have made applications to Severn Trent to connect the water. We have been granted permission for the Cookley site, but we are still waiting for the Chester Road site. Work has been done on site at Cookley to bore the hole through to the mains, but we are waiting for Severn Trent to make the connection. Chester Road is not as far advanced, but we are anticipating having both sites completed soon and I hope there will be a positive result to report in due course.

To the Cabinet Member for Property and Operational Services

5. I am sure that all members of the Council are pleased with the provision, by Worcestershire County Council, of new road signage indicating Kidderminster car parks.

However, in view of the facts that:

- a. The County has just carried out a Public Consultation on the installation of a Traffic Calming Scheme in Hoo Road designed to stop unnecessary use of this road; and
- b. The fact that a recent Scrutiny Exercise carried out by this Council identified that the Park and Ride Scheme, run from the Stadium Close Car Park, accessed from Hoo Road, is costing this Council some £54,000 per year whilst bringing in less than £12,000 in income and therefore recommended that the Council terminate this particular Park and Ride Scheme,

Could he tell me why he arranged for this scheme to be so prominently advertised on the County Council's road signs and how much replacement signs will cost if this scheme is terminated in the next few months?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Property and Operational Services

In terms of questions (a) and (b), Councillor Mrs Oborski is right to say the Council is consulting on traffic calming in Hoo Road. A questionnaire arrived on my mat relating to this last week and a consultation took place last night. I would say, in terms of signage, that I take the view that the traffic calming consultation will not affect the Park and Ride situation in Stadium Close. Instigation of signage took place several years ago in 2005 when we negotiated with the County Council for the whole of the district. We have been waiting for installation since that date which was unfortunately delayed

due to the change of the County Council's Highways maintenance contractor. The decision whether to terminate or continue with the Park and Ride Scheme will not be made until the February Council. As I said at the August Cabinet, I wished to delay this decision until I could properly take account of the effects of off-street car parking demand from the introduction of decriminalisation of on-street parking.

Supplementary question from Councillor Mrs F M Oborski

I hope you will agree with me that, if the Council does take that democratic decision at the budget meeting, we will not go on waiting a further two years to get any amendments to the signage?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Property and Operational Services

I do not always agree with your view.

Questions from Councillor H.J. Martin

To the Leader of the Council

6. Would the Leader please tell me the percentage level of Wyre Forest District Council Tax increase (excluding County Council, Fire and Police Authority increases) as agreed by Full Council and recorded in the Council Minutes for each year from 1999 to 2007 inclusive? Would he also tell me the level of monetary settlement received from central government in each of those years?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

With regard to A(55)R, I would refer the leader of the Opposition to the following:

C.78 - 5-2-1997, C.87 4-3-1998, C.97 3-3-1999, C.91 1-3-2000, C.196 - 28-2-2001, C.83 - 27-2-2002, C.98 27-3-2003, CM.569 - 25-2-2004, CM.773 23-2-2005, C.107 21-3-2006 and C.97 28-2-2007.

Supplementary question for Councillor H J Martin

I thank Councillor Campion for his answer and wish to point out that the Council Tax increase decreased considerably over the 3 years in which Health Concern was in control. Can I ask the leader, since the figures are now a matter of public record, can he please desist in misquoting them in Wyre Forest Matters.

Answer from the Leader of the Council

The figures are quoted in a party political publication. It is a matter of interpretation as to what or how figures are interpreted and it is perfectly properly explained,

To the Leader of the Council

7. Can I please be advised how many new Review Panels have been set up since Annual Council in May 2007? Can I also be advised of the number of individual meetings that this has so far generated?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

The number of Review Panels that have been set up since Annual Council in May 2007 is eleven which have generated 35 Review Panel meetings.

Supplementary Question from Councillor H J Martin

There appears to have been an additional number of meetings. When you delivered the new structure it was anticipated that it would reduce the number of meetings. I ask you to look again, as soon as possible, at the structure of the Council. It does not seem to be quite right. This goes right back to the year 2000 when the Council moved from the Committee System. It has been an experimental time which has been time consuming for officers and members. We need to be sure that we get value for money. Can we look again at the structure of Council before the new Civic Year commences, provided a new administration is not in power?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

As the Leader of the Opposition points out, it is a matter for Annual Council. I would remind you that Group Leaders discussed the current structure before Annual Council last year and we need to sit around a table at a Group Leaders' meeting before we change the structure. When we started as an Administration in 2004 we had five panels that had task and finish groups. The system has improved. There is always room for further improvement and obviously it is right and proper that Council looks again in May next year as to what is right for the ensuing year.

To the Leader of the Council

8. Will the Leader please advise me of the names of those Councillors, past or current, who have chaired the Planning (Development Control) Committee since May 2000 to date and the years in which they held that office?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

In order the answer is: 17-5-2000 - C.12, 16-5-2001 - C.13, 15-5-2002 - C.14, 14-5-2003 - C.13, 30-6-2004 - CM.16, 18-5-2005 CM17(d), 17-5-2006 - C.15(e) and 16-5-2007 - C.17 (h).

Supplementary question from Councillor H J Martin

This is a serious question about who is Chairman. I think it was Councillor Clee for four years, then Councillor Barton then Councillor Williams since 2004. I do not think you will find my name in your record. There are concerns about certain issues coming up

politically in the press, and in political websites and leaflets, that are politicising planning in a parish and Councillor Williams' Planning Committee has been totally non-political. It is important that this is retained. I have respect for these chairmen, even though we are of different political persuasions. It is important that members go to planning knowing that they can go there as members of Wyre Forest to consider a planning issue and not be party political. Would you please give me your assurance to this effect, as the Leader of the Council, in conjunction with the Chairman?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

I do not agree with politicising planning. I wholeheartedly concur and acknowledge the integrity of the Planning (Development Control) Committee Chairman. He has done an excellent job in an impartial fashion. If a Conservative leaflet has been inaccurate, I am sure the author will apologise. A Health Concern leaflet quoted an inaccurate figure on another issue. I understand people make mistakes.

To the Cabinet Member for Property and Operational Services

9. Whilst welcoming the introduction of decriminalised parking and the high profile of the new Parking Attendants, concerns are being expressed that there appears to be "zero tolerance" to people exceeding their parking time or parking illegally. Will the Cabinet Member assure me that he will keep this matter under review to ensure that Wyre Forest does not become a "no go" area leading to a negative impact within the local economy?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Property and Operational Services

I am grateful that you do welcome the introduction of parking attendants. However I do not agree with the question that you raise that our officers have zero tolerance. I have assurance through links with senior officers that we have a common sense and honourable approach to this. I hope this chamber would join with me and congratulate the success of the implementation of the scheme

Supplementary question from Councillor H J Martin

We know there is probably a shortage of on-street parking and more importantly of car parking in the town. I do not want this to sound political but I did put £2 million in the budget as a capital contingency for future parking. What has happened to the £2 million? Has it all gone in a black hole towards single site?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Property and Operational Services

I am not sure about the figure of £2 million and what it has to do with decriminalisation of on-street parking. It has not gone into a black hole. Wyre Forest should never be described as a black hole. Whilst some negative comments have been received from members since the introduction of the scheme, broadly, across the district, it has been accepted by shop keepers and traders. Whereas before we had a situation where the public knew they would not get caught parking illegally, because there was only one member of staff to deal with them, we now have an excellent turnover of car parking spaces, whereas previously it was difficult to get a space.

From Councillor B. Glass**To the Leader of the Council**

10. Can the Cabinet Member please advise what is happening regarding the alleged 18 hole golf academy on Kingsway? A date of 8th December had been set for the completion of contouring. Will this be met? If not when will it be complete?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

Unfortunately there has not been any development due to newts. The Development Control Manager has met with those concerned on site as recently as yesterday. A detailed programme of restoration is due in December, including protection for the said newts. Details of the outcome on neighbouring land has been discussed with the Environment Agency and will be reported back. Details of the second bund will also come back. We are hopeful that the current over tipping of materials will be removed and the site made clearer. I will ask the Head of Planning, Health and Environment to make sure that members are informed of developments and there will be an update at the meeting of the January 2008 Planning (Enforcement) Committee.

From Councillor N. J. Thomas.**To the Cabinet Member for Property and Operational Services**

11. Can the Cabinet Member please advise the current position regarding the Aggborough Park and Ride? It was my understanding that Council had agreed to discontinue this in view of the fact that it was loss making, under used and being subsidised by Council Tax payers. However Councillor Clee was recently quoted in the press promoting this facility urging residents to use it? Which is correct? Will it or won't it close? Have I misread the information? Is there a lack of unanimity within the Administration or does the left hand not know what the right hand is doing?

Supplementary Question from Councillor Thomas

As we are going to save one thousand pounds a week on the Park and Ride Scheme. Do you think we can have the lights fixed in here?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Property and Operational Services

I am sure we can stretch to this.

Questions from Councillor Mrs J. Fairbrother-Millis (Asked in her absence by Councillor H J Martin)

To the Leader of Council

12. I understand that the Project Board for Stourport Civic Amenities will start their work in January 2008. Would the leader please inform me, in addition to nominated elected members, who will be appointed to the Board?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

I wish to send best wishes to Councillor Mrs Fairbrother-Millis for a speedy recovery and hope to send her a further letter. The Boards, which were set up in relation to two parts of the single site project, were listed in the Council minutes. They are made up of all political parties. The site here at Stourport will require partnership working. We want to make sure that local partners are involved, for example, the Town Council. When it is up and running Councillor Mrs Fairbrother-Millis will be a member of the Stourport Board.

Supplementary question from Councillor H J Martin (on behalf of Councillor Mrs J Fairbrother-Millis)

Councillor Mrs Fairbrother- Millis has heard from a member of the County Council that there will be a County officer appointed. Can you confirm or deny this?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

I don't think so. The County are partners with the district, but I would not envisage them being part of the Stourport-on-Severn project. However, we are always looking at partners, especially if they can bring money, but I cannot imagine this. They will be involved as partners with the main part of single site. The matter will be reported on in due course.