

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER

27TH MAY 2015 (6PM)

Present:

Councillors: C Rogers (Chairman), A T Hingley (Vice-Chairman), S Arnold, J Aston, J Baker, G W Ballinger, R Bishop, J-P Campion, S J Chambers, S J M Clee, J R Desmond, N J Desmond, H E Dyke, S E Fearn, J Greener, I Hardiman, M J Hart, N Knowles, D Little, T A Muir, F M Oborski, J Phillips, M Rayner, J D Smith, S J Williams and G C Yarranton.

C.1 Prayers

Prayers were said by Pastor Rob Palmer from Franche Community Church.

C.2 Election of Chairman

Councillor C Rogers was nominated as Chairman. This was moved by Councillor M J Hart and seconded by I Hardiman.

Decision: Councillor C Rogers be elected as Chairman of Wyre Forest District Council for the ensuing municipal year.

C.3 Chairman – Investiture and Declaration of Acceptance of Office

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

C.4 Chairman's Response

The Chairman thanked Members for the great honour to be chosen as Chairman and he would do his very best with the trust placed in him.

C.5 Retiring Chairman

The retiring chairman was thanked by Councillor M Hart for his hard work over the past 12 months. He had been a chairman for the third time and had represented the Council well. He had conducted his role impeccably and he would be a hard act to follow.

C.6 Retiring Chairman – Presentation of Badges

The retiring chairman was presented with a Past Chairman's badge. Councillor S J Williams thanked Council for all the support he had received during his year of office and thanked his Vice Chairman for his help and wished him good luck in his year ahead. He also thanked Ian Miller, Caroline Newlands, Karen Walsh, Rhiannon Foxall and Sue Saunders for their support. He informed Members that he had raised £2,476 for his charities – The Museum of Carpet and Help for Heros. Lastly, he thanked his wife for her help as his consort and hoped that they had been good ambassadors for the district.

C.7 Appointment of Vice-Chairman

Councillor M J Hart nominated Councillor A Hingley as Vice-Chairman and this was seconded by Councillor I Hardiman.

Decision: Councillor A Hingley be elected as Vice-Chairman of Wyre Forest District Council for the ensuing municipal year.

C.8 Vice-Chairman – Investiture and Declaration of Acceptance of Office

After being invested with her Badge of Office, Councillor A Hingley made her Declaration of Acceptance of Office as Vice-Chairman.

C.9 Vice Chairman's Response

Councillor A Hingley thanked Council for her appointment and informed Members that she would do her best to support the Chairman.

Councillor F M Oborski thanked Councillor S J Williams for his superb year and congratulated the new chairman and vice chairman.

C.10 Appointment of Leader of the Council

A report was considered on the arrangements for the appointment of a Leader of the Council. A motion was moved by Councillor J-P Campion and seconded by Councillor I Hardiman to appoint Councillor M J Hart as Leader of the Council for the next four years.

Councillor J-P Campion reported that the role of Leader was a real honour in leading the Council often in difficult circumstances. Councillor Hart showed leadership and had stepped up to the challenge in the last 12 months. Councillor I Hardiman stated that Councillor Hart had ably supported Councillor J-P Campion as his deputy for several years. Councillor Hart had all the necessary leadership, management skills and political wisdom to be Leader of the Council.

Councillor M J Hart thanked the proposer and seconder for their kind

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comments and for placing their faith in him. It was a great honour to be appointed as Leader. He stated that the Council were in a different place to where they were in 2014 in that the public had spoken through the ballot boxes. He proposed to continue to provide good quality affordable housing and efficient public services for the residents that councillors served. There were many challenges going forward but he wanted to work with all the opposition parties and had already spoken to Group Leaders to seek their agreement on the political structure package for Council. He pointed out that the chairman of Overview & Scrutiny Committee would not be undertaken by a Conservative member. He paid tribute to those Members who had not been re-elected and those that had retired, including Mike Kelly and Pauline Hayward who had served their residents for decades and other Councillors like Chris Nicholls who had served the Council for a long time. He informed Council that he had appointed his new cabinet members and that he looked forward to working with everyone.

Decision: Councillor M J Hart be appointed as Leader of the Council for the next four years.

C.10 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Dyke, R E Gregory, S Harrington and J A Hart.

C.11 Declarations of Interests by Members

There were no declarations of interests.

C.12 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 25th February 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

C.13 Public Participation

There was no public participation.

C.14 Questions

Two questions had been submitted in accordance with Standing Order A5 by a Member of the Council.

Question from Councillor N Knowles to the Leader of the Council

Given the closure of several polling stations that occurred for the 7th May elections, and the subsequent queuing at those left open, will the administration re-consider their decision regarding their closure programme, and undertake a brief review with the intention of re-opening them.

Answer from the Leader of the Council

Let me set the record straight, it wasn't the administration's decision to close polling stations, the administration don't have that power, it was a democratic vote at Council that took the decision. In terms of the substantive part of your question, yes there will be a review. The Returning Officer every year conducts a review in the normal way and of course there will be a session for agents and political parties to meet with the Returning Officer and his team on 8th July 2015 at Wyre Forest House and there will be an opportunity to raise those issues then. There were of course some queues at polling stations but there were not queues at many polling stations, out of the 40 plus stations that we have, I saw queues at a couple but most ran smoothly. It is important that we don't make a knee jerk reaction and assume, from the fact that Council decided to close a few polling stations that's why there were queues. It was a general election, district election, some parish elections plus the local advisory poll, we need to gather all of the information and evidence and review the matter but certainly no knee jerk reactions on the part of this Council.

Supplementary Question from Councillor N Knowles

We don't believe everything in the Kidderminster Shuttle every week but we do believe some of the weeks and their coverage of the polling station situation on general election day was quite revealing. I do think this was a political decision to close so many polling stations particularly in working class areas, where it was difficult for people to vote but I wonder if the Leader of the Council would agree that from reports we've had and I appreciate the comments about the review in July but it did seem there were long queues at several polling stations and the worse aspect was that people were denied the right to vote because they saw the queue but wonder if you would like to comment on the queues at some polling stations that were reported in the press and elsewhere and the fact that many people failed to cast their vote.

Supplementary Answer from the Leader of the Council

Thank you for your question, I'm delighted so many people went to vote because they went to vote Conservative as is clearly demonstrated in this chamber and let me place on record that absolutely no member of Wyre Forest who was on the electoral register was denied the right to vote. That is an exceptionally unfortunate statement that you've made because I know and you raise the Kidderminster Shuttle to show the front page and I have no control over what the Shuttle print. I remember when Doctor Taylor for example returned as Member of Parliament that was plastered on the front page and if you lend me the paper, perhaps I could show members of this chamber what was on page 3 where it reports 21 out of 30 seats were won by the Conservative Group. The Returning Officer was at that polling station at Trinity Methodist church between 9.00pm to 9.30pm and had walked the length and breadth of the queue and took postal votes from people that were queuing and reassured each and every one of those members of public that they would vote. And in fact it was the coalition government that changed the legislation last year that said provided you are in a queue to vote you can vote

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so we have not disenfranchised anybody and most certainly we have not closed any polling stations deliberately in working class areas because this party and this side of the chamber serve all citizens of this council not just working class ones.

Question from Councillor N Knowles to the Leader of the Council

Would the administration commit to investigating the possibility of introducing a computerised system of vote counting as apparently happens in some other places whilst at the same time congratulating our staff for their sterling performance on the 7th and 8th May.

Answer from the Leader of the Council

In short yes, happy that we don't rule anything out. In banks for example we have counting machines that can count the number of bank notes, but of course there are caveats to it, firstly funding costly equipment and we'd have to make sure you've got funding to be able to invest in this type of machinery but would also need to cope with different size of ballot papers. On one of the district wards Lickhill had only 5 candidates but Stour & Wilden town council ward had 17 candidates, therefore you need to factor all things into that. It's easy to envisage a counting machine for verifying but you would still need to do it manually to ensure candidates are allocated to the right pile in order for you to count them, but I wouldn't wish to rule it out but will investigate.

Supplementary Answer from Councillor N Knowles

Will you investigate with a view to bringing at an early date the decision back to this Council probably with a recommendation to seek funding from government to fund the new situation.

Supplementary Answer from the Leader of the Council

No, not go as far as that but will look at it and if there is any further information, will bring it back to full council in due course.

C.15 Chairman's Communications

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

The Chairman announced that his consort for the year ahead would be Annie Ball and that his chosen charity was Midlands Air Ambulance and he would be announcing various functions soon.

C.16 Political and Constitutional Structures 2015/2016

Council received a report from the Solicitor to the Council on the proposed political and constitutional structures for 2015/2016.

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The Leader of the Council introduced the report and referred Members to the updated paper on the political structure at appendix 1 which referred to the new cabinet members and the committee chairman and vice chairman appointments at appendix 2. Councillor H E Dyke was proposed as chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, a role she had held previously with dignity and fairness.

Members were referred to the updated paper on outside bodies and were informed that there was only one name proposed for each role. He pointed out that the word scrutiny should not be included in the title of Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee. There were some amendments to the constitution which were shown at appendix 5 with the revised political balance at appendix 6. Some of the committees had been reduced in size.

Decision:

- 1. The proposed Political Management Structure for 2015/2016 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report to Council be approved.**
- 2. The Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees as contained in Appendix 2 of the report to Council be approved.**
- 3. The Municipal Calendar as set out in Appendix 3 of the report to Council be adopted.**
- 4. The appointments to outside bodies as set out in Appendix 4 of the report to Council be agreed.**
- 5. The revisions to the Constitution as set out in Appendix 5 of the report to Council be agreed.**
- 6. The revised chart of political balance as set out in Appendix 6 of the report to Council be approved.**
- 7. The Solicitor to the Council be authorised 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.17 Members' Annual Activity Reports and Attendance 2014/2015

Council received the schedule of Members' Annual Reports which gave details of activities in their role as District Councillors for the 2013/2014 municipal year and received a record of attendance.

Decision: The reports and attendance be noted.

C.18 Annual Reports for the Municipal Year 2014/2015

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

In response to a Member query, it was confirmed that the co-opted members would continue on the Ethics & Standards Committee. The meeting had met once in the last municipal year and it was stated that the allowance payable was in line with the Independent Remuneration Panel which was accepted by Council. It was also confirmed that there would be representatives from Bewdley Town Council and Stourport-on-Severn Town Council on the Local Plans Review Panel.

Decision: The Annual Reports for the Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Ethics and Standards Committee be noted.

C.19 Leader of the Council Announcement

The Leader of the Council announcements were tabled at the meeting and he referred Members to it.

Decision: The information be noted.

C.20 Honorary Alderman Appointment Procedure

Council received a report from the Leader of the Council which asked for approval of the updated appointment procedure for conferring the title of Honorary Alderman.

Members were advised that the report was not an opportunity to nominate names for honorary aldermen but to agree the protocol for going forward. It was confirmed that a special meeting would need to take place for appointing an honorary alderman but this would be held prior to a Council meeting.

Decision: The updated Appointment Procedure for Honorary Alderman as set out in Appendix 1 of the report to Council be approved.

The meeting ended at 18.56 p.m.