

Open

Council

Agenda

6pm
Wednesday, 9th December 2015
Council Chamber
Wyre Forest House
Finepoint Way
Kidderminster



Council

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COUNCIL MEETING

1st December 2015

TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL AND HONORARY ALDERMAN

PRESS AND PUBLIC

Dear Member

YOU ARE INVITED to attend a meeting of the Wyre Forest District Council to be held **at 6.00p.m. on Wednesday 9th December 2015**, in the Council Chamber, Wyre Forest House, Finepoint Way, Kidderminster.

The Agenda for the meeting is enclosed.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Miller
Chief Executive

Declaration of Interests by Members – interests of members in contracts and other matters

Declarations of Interest are a standard item on every Council and Committee agenda and each Member must provide a full record of their interests in the Public Register.

In addition, alongside the Register of Interest, the Members Code of Conduct (“the Code”) requires the Declaration of Interests at meetings. Members have to decide first whether or not they have a disclosable interest in the matter under discussion.

Please see the Members’ Code of Conduct as set out in Section 14 of the Council’s constitution for full details.

Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI) / Other Disclosable Interest (ODI)

DPI’s and ODI’s are interests defined in the Code of Conduct that has been adopted by the District.

If you have a DPI (as defined in the Code) in a matter being considered at a meeting of the Council (as defined in the Code), the Council’s Standing Orders require you to leave the room where the meeting is held, for the duration of any discussion or voting on that matter.

If you have an ODI (as defined in the Code) you will need to consider whether you need to leave the room during the consideration of the matter.

(A) TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE COUNCIL

The Council

1. Is the ultimate decision making Body.
2. Determines the Budget (but reserves powers to itself in relation to requirements).
3. Is responsible for appointing (and dismissing) the Leader of the Council.
4. Appoints at its Annual Meeting, the Regulatory Committees, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and any other Committees/Forums necessary to conduct the Council’s business.
5. Decides on matters where the Cabinet is not minded to determine a matter in accordance with Council policy.

(B) MATTERS RESERVED TO THE COUNCIL

1. Those reserved by Law e.g. levying a rate, borrowing money, promotion of or opposition to a Bill in Parliament.
2. Matters reserved to the Council by financial regulations.
3. The adoption and amendment of Standing Orders, including the powers and duties of Committees and other forums.
4. Power to make, amend, revoke or enact or enforce any byelaws.
5. The determination of the objectives of the Council.
6. Matters of new policy or variation of existing policy as contained within the budget and policy framework.
7. Local Development Framework adoption.
8. Any function where a decision would be contrary to a plan, policy, budget or strategy previously adopted by the Council, which would be contrary to the Council’s Standing Orders, Financial Regulations or Executive arrangements.
9. The Scheme of Delegations to Officers.

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If members of the public do not wish to have their image captured they should sit in the Stourport and Bewdley Room where they can still view the meeting.

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If you have any queries regarding this, please speak with the Council's Legal Officer at the meeting.

Wyre Forest District Council

Council

Wednesday, 9th December 2015

Council Chamber, Wyre Forest House, Finepoint Way, Kidderminster

Part 1

Open to the press and public

Agenda item	Subject	Page Number
1.	Prayers To be read by Reverend Robert Legge, Team Vicar for Kidderminster East Parish.	
2.	Apologies for Absence	
3.	Declarations of Interests by Members In accordance with the Code of Conduct, to invite Members to declare the existence and nature of any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI's) and / or Other Disclosable Interests (ODI's) in the following agenda items and indicate the action that they will be taking when the item is considered. Please see the Members' Code of Conduct as set out in Section 14 of the Council's Constitution for full details.	
4.	Minutes To confirm as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 th September 2015.	11
5.	Public Participation In accordance with the Council's scheme for public speaking at meetings of Council, to allow members of the public to present petitions, ask questions, or make statements, details of which have been received by 12 noon on Monday 30 th November 2015. <i>If you wish to speak on an urgent matter that has arisen since the deadline and you could not reasonably have known about it at the time, you should register your interest in speaking no later than 9am on the day of the meeting of Council. In the case of a request to speak on an urgent matter, the Solicitor to the Council will rule on whether or not the matter is urgent and that ruling will be final.</i>	
6.	Questions Six questions have been submitted in accordance with Standing Order A5 by Members of the Council.	18

7.	<p>Chairman's Communications</p> <p>To note the engagements of the Chairman of the Council since the Council's last meeting.</p>	20
8.	<p>Leader of the Council Announcements</p> <p>To receive announcements from the Leader of the Council.</p>	
9.	<p>Motions Submitted under Standing Orders</p> <p>Two motions have been received in accordance with Standing Orders (Section 7, 4.1).</p> <p>1. Motion received from Councillor J Shaw, Labour Group on the Housing and Planning Bill</p> <p><i>Council notes,</i></p> <p><i>A) that the Housing and Planning Bill is currently being debated in Parliament and, if passed, would threaten the provision of genuinely affordable homes for rent and to buy through</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>- extending the right-to-buy to housing association tenants, and</i> <i>- undermining Section 106 requirements on private developers to provide affordable homes.</i> <p><i>B) that there is no commitment in the Bill that affordable homes will be replaced like-for-like in the local area.</i></p> <p><i>C) that, whilst measures to help first-time buyers are welcome, the starter-homes proposals would be unaffordable to the majority of families and young people in Wyre Forest, would not protect taxpayer investment, and would be built at the expense of genuinely affordable homes to rent and buy.</i></p> <p><i>D) that the Bill undermines Localism by taking 32 new powers for the Secretary of State over councils and local communities, including the ability to override Local Plans and to mandate rents for social tenants.</i></p> <p><i>E) that the Bill, whilst introducing some welcome measures to get to grips with rogue landlords, does not help with high rents, poor conditions and insecurity affecting many of England's 11 million private renters.</i></p> <p><i>Council resolves, therefore,</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1) to analyse and report on the likely impact of the extension of right-to-buy, the starter-homes scheme and the changes to section 106 requirements and any other relevant aspects of the Bill on the local availability of affordable homes.</i> <i>2) to delegate the responsibility for a report, if necessary, to a newly-constituted working party, or to the Local Plans Review Panel.</i> 	

	<p>3) <i>to use this information to support the Leader of the Council in writing to the Secretary of State with Council's concerns about the Bill.</i></p> <p>4) <i>to set up an urgent meeting between the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and representatives of housing associations active locally with Mark Garnier MP, to express our concerns.</i></p> <p>5) <i>to make public Council's concerns, including by publishing information about the above matters on the council's website, and promoting it through the local press.</i></p> <p>2. Motion received from Councillor J Shaw, Labour Group on Low Wage Economy, Wyre Forest</p> <p><i>Council,</i></p> <p><i>concerned that Wyre Forest is a low-waged area,</i></p> <p><i>welcomes the acceptance by the Government of the principle of a Living Wage and further welcomes its decision to retain tax credits for the Working Poor,</i></p> <p><i>but notes that its proposed Living Wage level is below that calculated by the Living Wage Foundation, and further notes that the continuing intention to remove £12 billion from cost of benefits is unlikely to be achieved without reducing the incomes of the Working Poor,</i></p> <p><i>resolves,</i></p> <p><i>to enter into a dialogue with the local business community, to chart a way towards higher real incomes for lower-waged workers in Wyre Forest.</i></p>	
10.	<p>Urgent Motions submitted under Standing Orders</p> <p>To consider motions in the order they have been received which, by reason of special circumstances, should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Standing Orders (Section 7, 4.1 (vii)).</p>	
11.	<p>Worcestershire Devolution Proposals</p> <p>To consider a report from the Chief Executive which invites Council to note the development of devolution proposals for Worcestershire.</p>	21
12.	<p>Review of Polling Places and Polling Places for Kidderminster Foreign Parish</p> <p>To consider a report from the Returning Officer & Chief Executive which recommends changes following the review of polling places and polling districts within the Parish of Kidderminster Foreign.</p> <p><i>(The appendices to this report have been circulated electronically)</i></p>	38

<p>13.</p>	<p>Policy and Budget Framework</p> <p>Matters which require a Decision by Council.</p> <p>a. Recommendations from Licensing & Environmental Committee on 5th October 2015</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gambling Act 2055 Revised Statement of Principles Review Consultation Results <p>b. Recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 5th November 2015</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy Mid-year Review Report 2015/16 <p>c. Recommendations from Cabinet on 10th November 2015</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Tax Reduction Scheme Review 2016/17 <p>d. Recommendations from Licensing & Environmental Committee on 7th December 2015 (To follow)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fees and charges, including changes as a consequence of the Deregulation Act 2015 <p>Please note that the reports and associated documents, referred to above, have been circulated electronically to Members. Public inspection copies are available on request. Please refer to the front cover for contact details.</p>	<p>43</p> <p>44</p> <p>45</p> <p>-</p>
<p>14.</p>	<p>Half Yearly Report from the Chief Executive</p> <p>To consider a half yearly report from the Chief Executive.</p>	<p>64</p>
<p>15.</p>	<p>To consider any other business, details of which have been communicated to the Solicitor to the Council before the commencement of the meeting, which the Chairman by reason of special circumstances considers to be of so urgent a nature that it cannot wait until the next meeting.</p>	
<p>16.</p>	<p>Exclusion of the Press and Public</p> <p>To consider passing the following resolution:</p> <p>“That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of “exempt information” as defined in the paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act”.</p>	

Part 2

Not open to the Press and Public

17.	To consider any other business, details of which have been communicated to the Solicitor to the Council before the commencement of the meeting, which the Chairman by reason of special circumstances considers to be of so urgent a nature that it cannot wait until the next meeting.	
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WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER

30TH SEPTEMBER 2015 (6PM)

Present:

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

C.36 Prayers

Prayers were said by Pastor Philip Hearn from Kidderminster Evangelical Church.

C.37 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

C.38 Declarations of Interests by Members

There were no declarations of interests.

C.39 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meetings held on 29th July 2015 and 10th September 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

C.40 Public Participation

There was no public participation.

C.41 Questions

Five questions had been submitted in accordance with Standing Order A5 by Members of the Council.

Question from Councillor N Knowles to the Leader of the Council

Given the crisis situation pertaining to refugees who are currently making their way to Europe and who are being given sanctuary by many states including Britain what plans and attitude do we have in Wyre Forest to those refugees who wish to settle in Britain and Wyre Forest in particular, if

they are made aware of our hospitality and guarantee of a safe and welcoming environment.

Answer from the Leader of the Council

I assume when you talk about refugees, whilst not specific given the huge number of refugees coming into Europe are Syrian, I will respond in respect of Syrian refugees. You will of course have received my letter of 8th September 2015 which set out clearly what the Council's plans are and you will have seen the further email I sent under the no surprises protocol on 21st September stating that Wyre Forest were playing its part with the County Council and other districts in Worcestershire. You will also see the comments in my Leaders announcements. There are two motions on the agenda this evening which I'm sure, following debate in the normal way, will show very clearly what this council and administrations plans and how best to deal with the situation.

Supplementary Question from Councillor N Knowles

I would like to point out that the phrasing is such that it mentions pertaining to refugees and doesn't just mention Syrian refugees, I wondered if you wanted to respond about refugees other than Syrian making their way to Europe.

Answer from the Leader of the Council

The answer will come out in the debate this evening.

Question from Councillor J Shaw to the Cabinet Member for Transformation & Change

When a caller to the Hub or Green Street is informed that no-one is available immediately to deal with the enquiry, could the response be amended, to give an indication of how long the wait is likely to be?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Transformation & Change

The answer is yes it could. However the issue has been considered before and a decision was made to give no indication for the waiting time for the following reasons:

Any time that has been calculated by the phone system will only be an estimation of the time that caller might have to wait for. Whilst we understand the frustration for the caller, what we tell them may not be accurate. If the waiting time is longer than estimated, then the frustration felt by callers is greater than not knowing how long they may have to wait. The message played gives alternative methods for contacting the council, i.e. encouraging people to make payments on line and they are directed to do so on the message. We want to save money for the council taxpayers and free up more time for our Hub and depot staff and they can then deal with face-to-face enquiries. So for those reasons we made the decision in the first place and I'm still happy with that decision.

Supplementary Question from Councillor J Shaw

Thank you, but would appreciate if those points could be put down on paper. I think the individual who asked me to ask the question may be watching but, just in case, I would like to report back.

Question from Councillor J Shaw to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

How many operational staff are available daily to carry out the council's parking enforcement and car park monitoring duties?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

In total we have 5.5 full time employees in service but with annual leave and an on duty rota system, there are usually 4 full time employees in the district on any given day.

Supplementary Question from Councillor J Shaw

Are you satisfied with the level of service they are able to give? Not being critical of staff, I'm aware that a new part of my ward covers High Street in Stourport-on-Severn where I have for a long time heard dissatisfaction with the amount of parking that takes place on the side of the road where there are double yellow lines. Do we have enough members of staff to carry out a satisfactory level of service?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

You'll be pleased to hear that the service has recently undergone a review and there are proposals to increase the number of parking officers but this is subject to consultation.

Question from Councillor J Shaw to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration

How many staff are available daily to carry out the council's Planning Enforcement duties; (Sept 2nd '15, 141 cases)?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration

We have 6 individuals to deal with planning enforcement issues within this authority. Do I think it's reasonable? Absolutely. Whilst of course we would like lots of capacity to deal with the ebbs and flows, I think we have a Planning service that is able to respond to minor/major applications in a competent way and we have been regularly offering good practice on enforcement matters, and resources are appropriate.

Supplementary Question from Councillor J Shaw

How many staff are dedicated to this task? I think this is 2. Do we have more than 1, because the figure he gave I believe is for the development control section which is not generally dedicated to planning enforcement issues?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration

The world has moved on and officers are multi skilled and as you are aware planning development control has come a long way. It's sensible for a case officer to deal with enforcement rather than a dedicated officer, so for me my answer of 6 individuals who are able to deal with multi skilled issues is sufficient and I don't think we have any planning enforcement issues. If we did we would look at resources or the policy and address it. I don't recognise a problem and see the resources as appropriate.

Question from Councillor J Shaw to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

What is the view of the Portfolio Holder on the effectiveness of the council's "continental" public toilet provision in Stourport town centre?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

I take it you refer to the use of the Wheatsheaf Pub in the High Street. I understand there have been no complaints about this service and presume the provision is satisfactory.

Supplementary Question from Councillor J Shaw

Does the portfolio holder think the provision for disabled residents in terms of possibly using the public toilet in Stourport town centre is satisfactory?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

Yes, all I can say is with regard to the main toilets in Stourport, we are planning a complete refurbishment of the Riverside toilets so hopefully the disabled toilet facility will be up to standard there and if you wish to have a conversation with me outside of this meeting on disabled toilets elsewhere, I am happy to do so.

C.42 Chairman's Communications

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

C.43 Leader's Announcements and Report

The Leader of the Council tabled his report and informed Members it had been a very busy Summer. A lot of work was going on in the district, e.g.

Bewdley Medical Centre, Kidderminster town centre etc. There was disruption to shoppers/traders in Kidderminster town centre but he was confident it was a short term pain for a very long term gain with a major scheme. The Hoobrook link road was underway and he had visited the new leisure centre which was scheduled to be completed on time and under budget.

C.44 Motions Submitted Under Standing Order No. D1 (1)

Two motions had been received in accordance with Standing Order D1(1).

The Leader of the Council, on behalf of the Conservative Group, presented their motion and informed Members that it was right for the Council to do its bit in providing aid to those most in need. There were difficult issues to be navigated through but working with other district colleagues, a joint bid would be submitted to ensure the appropriate funding is received.

Councillor Knowles, on behalf of the Labour Group presented an amendment and asked Council to accept as a minimum the Prime Minister's announcement of taking in 20,000 Syrian refugees.

A robust debate ensued and a member stated that until the amount of funding was known, no decision should be made.

Upon a vote, the amendment was lost.

Members then held a full debate on the substantive motion.

Councillor P Dyke left the meeting at 7.11pm and returned at 7.12pm.

In summary, the Leader of the Council stated that the situation required the United Nations and central government support as the Council could not solve the problem itself.

Decision:

Council notes the Humanitarian Disaster unfolding in Syria as a result of the Civil War and this Council deplores the killing of innocent civilians.

Council supports the stance taken by this Council to encourage communities to provide aid and support to displaced refugees across Europe and especially those in camps close to the Syrian border, as the Council is very sympathetic to the plight of the refugees.

Council supports the Prime Minister David Cameron's announcement to take in 20,000 Syrian Refugees over the next 5 years and the £1 billion of aid already committed, as a clear demonstration that the United Kingdom is playing its part.

Council endorses the approach being taken by the Local Government Association (LGA) in its discussions with the Home Office and other Government departments in order to secure full funding for local

authorities in supporting refugees.

Council notes that there are many complexities to re-housing Syrian refugees within the Wyre Forest area including the cultural and socio-economic issues which need to be fully taken into consideration.

Council resolves to support the current steps being undertaken.

C.45 Urgent Motions Submitted Under Standing Order No. D1 (7)

There were no urgent motions.

C.46 Community Governance Review of Kidderminster

Council considered a report from the Chief Executive following consultation.

The Leader of the Council led Members through the report and thanked officers for the tremendous amount of work that had been carried out.

Councillors J-P Champion and T L Onslow left the meeting at this point, (7.50pm).

Members discussed the review and welcomed the creation of Kidderminster Town Council and were pleased with all the negotiations that had been done.

Councillors J-P Champion and T L Onslow came back to the meeting at this point, (7.52pm).

Members commented that it was great for Kidderminster and the first elections would be held on 5th May 2016.

Decision: The reorganisation order in Appendix A of the report to Council be agreed, with delegation to the Solicitor to the Council to make any necessary or reasonable adjustments prior to sealing.

C.47 Policy and Budget Framework – Matters which require a decision by Council

a. Recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 8th September 2015

- **Annual Report on Treasury Management Service and Actual Prudential Indicators 2014/15**

Decision:

- **The Actual 2014/15 prudential and treasury indicators as set out in the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, be approved.**

- **The annual treasury management report for 2014/15 be noted.**

b. Recommendations from Cabinet, 16th September 2015

In response to questions by Members, the Cabinet Member for Health Well-Being and Housing replied that the Council representations would be decided on in the usual way. She also replied that the service was seamless and there was good reason to have a council debate on it, but from the public point of view, there would be no changes.

- **Revised Partnership Arrangements for Worcestershire Regulatory Services**

Decision:

- 1. The current Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership is dissolved by mutual agreement on 31 March 2016;**
- 2. A new Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership comprising the six district councils is created on 1 April 2016, in accordance with the terms recommended by Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee; and that the Council's Licensing functions be delivered through this Shared Service.**
- 3. The new Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership enters into a service level agreement with Worcestershire County Council for the provision of trading standards services in accordance with terms to be agreed by the Acting Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services; and,**
- 4. All existing contracts and service level agreements between the existing Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership and other local authorities are novated to the new Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership.**

C.48 Corporate Governance

This agenda item was withdrawn in light of there being no change to political balance following the Blakebrook & Habberley South by-election.

The meeting ended at 8.05 pm.

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL
9TH DECEMBER 2015
QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL

1. Question from Councillor N Knowles to the Cabinet Member for Planning & Economic Regeneration

Will the cabinet member investigate a possible method of providing help to any potential small start up retail business which might benefit from perhaps a business rate reduction such as for Canterbury Road Post Office?

2. Question from Councillor N Knowles to the Leader of the Council

How will the Leader push forward the new housing starts and reduce the housing waiting list, currently more than 2,000, when the Chancellor's Autumn statement and spending review has made it much more difficult for social housing associations in Wyre Forest to build for the future?

3. Question from Councillor N Knowles to the Leader of the Council

Can the Leader give an absolute assurance that Council assets, such as Aggborough Football Ground and Kidderminster Carolians Rugby Field, will not be sold off to meet the shortfall in Council's monetary needs after the Chancellor's Autumn statement?

4. Question from Councillor N Knowles to the Cabinet Member for Resources

The Cabinet member is aware that Wyre Forest District Council has approximately £3million in its reserve fund. Is he also aware that Wyre Forest has low financial reserves, particularly compared to some other councils, and reserves cannot be relied on as part of government policy to reduce our spending, particularly before we are allowed to keep 100% of our business rates?

5. Question from Councillor N Knowles to the Cabinet Member for Transformation & Change

Given that four businesses, now closed, did not pay their business rates tax to Wyre Forest District Council and that the amount owing to WFDC had to be forfeited, £149,224.81, is the Cabinet Member content that we have in place the best possible method of ensuring that businesses are able to pay their dues to us, and that such businesses cannot continue to trade when they are in a non viable position and alarm bells are rung, to pay their taxes to Council.

6. Question from Councillor F M Oborski MBE to the Leader of the Council

As the Government has now agreed that as well as full funding for the first year there will now be transitional funding for five years for Syrian refugees; can the Leader tell me, when can we expect the first refugee families to arrive in Wyre Forest; what discussions have been held with local social housing providers and what discussions have been held with the local Islamic Community?

Chairman's List of Functions – 2015/16

OCTOBER 2015

- 2nd WCC Chairman's Charity Day – Morgan
- 2nd Mayor of Kidderminster Halloween Charity Dinner
- 4th Redditch Civic Service
- 22nd No Barriers Awards
- 26TH Mayor of Bewdley Severn Valley Railway Trip

NOVEMBER 2015

- 4th H&W Sports Awards 2015
- 4th SOS Mayor's Charity Choral Concert*
- 8th Remembrance Sunday Parade, Stourport
- 11th Remembrance Day – Two Minute Silence, Wyre Forest House
- 13th Dinner Party for Civic Heads, Shropshire
- 15th RoadPeace Service
- 16th Minute's Silence for Victims of Paris Terror Attacks
- 20th King Charles I School Founders Day Service
- 20th Three Kings Parade
- 20th Wyre Forest Young Voices
- 26th Worcester Victorian Christmas Fayre
- 28th Kidderminster Choral Society – Music for Brass and Voices
- 29th Wyre Forest Symphony Orchestra

DECEMBER 2015

- 4th Black Tie Gala showing of new James Bond Film
- 6th Memorial Mass and Service, St Johns
- 6th WFDC Chairman's Carol Service

* Denotes attendance by Vice Chairman

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING
9TH DECEMBER 2015

Devolution Proposals for Worcestershire

OPEN	
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor M J Hart, The Leader of the Council
DIRECTOR:	Ian Miller, Chief Executive
CONTACT OFFICER:	Ian Miller, Chief Executive ian.miller@wyreforestdc.gov.uk Ext 2700
APPENDICES:	Appendix A – summary of draft devolution proposals for Worcestershire

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To consider the emerging devolution proposals for Worcestershire.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 The Council is asked to NOTE the current progress with Worcestershire's case for devolution as set out in the draft summary document in Appendix A.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Members' Forum on 15 October provided a briefing on the work being done to develop devolution proposals for Worcestershire. The current draft summary document outlining Worcestershire's emerging case for devolution is in Appendix A. Council is asked to consider the direction of travel. A further report will be brought back to Council in 2016 before any formal decisions are made concerning devolution.

3.2 England is one of the most centralised countries among Western democracies. In the UK context, devolution is not new. In the late 1990s, the UK Parliament devolved powers to the legislatures of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Mayor for London and Greater London Authority were also created. Earlier attempts at devolution in other parts of England faltered in 2004 when voters in the North East rejected the creation of a regional assembly. The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 provides for Parliamentary orders to create combined authorities – these allow local authorities to combine their economic development and strategic transportation functions in a new body, which can also receive additional functions. However the devolution agenda has gained significant momentum since the referendum on Scottish independence in September 2014. More powers are to be devolved in Scotland and Wales, and the

Government has recognised that more powers should be devolved within England.

- 3.3 The most recent legislation is the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill. This is still progressing through the Parliamentary process and is subject to change. The Government intends that the legislation will define the way in which the devolution agenda progresses. It would open up the mechanisms for Government to confer any public body's functions on a combined authority, and also for combined authorities to operate in respect of any local government function (not just those related to economic development and transport). The Bill would simplify the process for creation or alteration of a combined authority. It also provides a mechanism for any public body's functions to be conferred on a local authority, both district and county councils.
- 3.4 The Coalition government announced the Manchester deal ('Devo Manc') in 2014 and this was followed by a deal in relation to the Sheffield City Region. Since the 2015 election, the new government has been swift to announce further devolution deals including the first non-metropolitan one for Cornwall as a single county. The proposed West Midlands devolution deal was signed on 17 November. It is not directly relevant to Wyre Forest, as the administration decided not to progress an application at this time for the Council to join the West Midlands Combined Authority as a non-constituent member. However the deal includes a number of provisions that could extend to a wider footprint than the 7 metropolitan councils over time. The Government has committed in the Deal to working with the shadow West Midlands Combined Authority to ensure that skills devolution supports the delivery of an Employment and Skills Strategy across the three LEP areas i.e. including the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP. It has also committed to working with the Combined Authority and the three LEPs to support the further development and implementation of an integrated Business Support Ecosystem (including business support, inward investment, trade and innovation) across the three LEP geography. Further work would need to be undertaken to develop the governance model to enable these commitments to be realised but it is significant that Government has recognised the importance of working across the three LEPs for these key drivers of the economy.
- 3.5 As of September 2015, 38 areas, including Worcestershire, submitted bids or expressed an interest to central government to pursue options for devolving powers. The 38 areas are now in negotiation with government, with the emerging results being the first demonstration of the level of appetite that the Government has for devolution of power in England. The devolution agenda has become a dominant feature of discussions on the shape of the local government environment and public service reform.
- 3.6 With the exception of Cornwall, no devolution deal has been announced or concluded for a county area; and again with the exception of Cornwall, all announced deals involve a combined authority with an elected Mayor. Worcestershire has the opportunity to push this agenda forward by acting as a

pioneer for developing a suitable governance arrangement for a county (a public services leaders' board) as well as an ambitious set of priorities to achieve genuine results.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 Building on the existing shared commitment for public sector reform and economic growth, in September 2015 all seven local authority Leaders in the county signed the attached draft summary document signalling their intent to work together on the case for devolution across a Worcestershire footprint. The commitment to work together also includes wider public sector partners including West Mercia Police, Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership and Clinical Commissioning Groups.
- 4.2 Up to September 2015, developing the case for devolution primarily focused on outlining a discrete set of initial 'asks' and 'offers'. These build on existing plans for Worcestershire, but focus on the added value that a devolution deal could bring. The six main themes are outlined below and are all underpinned by improved data sharing:
- Public Estates
 - Connecting People
 - Health and Social Care Reform
 - Infrastructure and Investment
 - Skills and Innovation
 - Environment.
- 4.3 Discussions around potential future governance arrangements with the seven council leaders have concluded that there is no appetite for creation of a unitary council or councils: there will be no local government reorganisation in Worcestershire. They have also concluded that any governance model would need to be proportionate to the 'deal' if and when agreed. It would certainly not include an elected Mayor – other means will be identified to demonstrate to Government that there is an accountable and identifiable individual to whom Government and others may turn. This will involve the Leader of the County Council chairing the proposed public services leaders' board.
- 4.4 Working closely with civil servants in DCLG, BIS, the Treasury and local partners the focus recently has been on further developing the detail within each of the specific themes for devolution set out in paragraph 4.2. This involves:-
- Seeking Member and partner feedback on draft propositions
 - Agreeing timelines for negotiations and initial appetite for proposed priorities
 - Further development of the detail on the high level business cases and the proposed future governance arrangements; and
 - Continued engagement with Members and local partners.

- 4.5 The refined proposals will be submitted to Government before Christmas, prior to high-level discussions with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government which are scheduled for January. A further report will be brought back to Council in 2016 to enable a formal decision to be made upon the Council's approach to devolution in the light of the new legislation and ongoing work and discussions.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 No financial implications arise directly from this report. In line with contributions from the other district councils in Worcestershire, the Council has provided £5k of funding towards the cost of consultants who are supporting the development of the proposals. The bulk of the cost is being met by the County Council.
- 5.2 The devolution deal, once finalised, might have financial implications for Worcestershire and this Council – for example in terms of control over funding streams and opportunities to deliver savings through public service reform. Some aspects of the proposals would commit the Council to implement different ways of working, for example in respect of public estates and connecting people. The business case for change will set out estimated financial implications and will be considered before decisions are taken.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no specific legal or policy implications to consider at this stage as no formal decisions are being sought.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 An initial assessment has been undertaken and no adverse implications for the protected characteristics has been identified.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 Risks relating to detailed proposals for changes will need to be identified and considered as part of future decision-making. In terms of the process itself, the risk of submitting proposals that do not enjoy wide local support is being mitigated by steps such as the Members' Forum briefing and this report as well as discussion with partner organisations. There remains a risk that, however much support may exist locally for the proposals, it may not be possible to secure Government support for them: there is no certainty about the outcome of negotiations.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The devolution agenda has the potential for significant impact over time. Further reports will be brought forward to Cabinet or Council as appropriate when formal decisions are required. For now, the Council is invited to note the current progress with Worcestershire's case for devolution.

10. CONSULTEES

- 10.1 The Leader of the Council.
- 10.2 Corporate Leadership Team.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Details of the West Midlands devolution deal may be seen at these links:

<http://www.westmidlandscombinedauthority.org.uk/assets/docs/WestMidlandsDealSummary.pdf>

<http://www.westmidlandscombinedauthority.org.uk/assets/docs/WestMidlandsDealDocument.pdf>

- 11.2 Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill

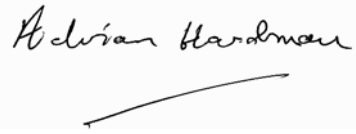
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/2015-2016/0097/15097.pdf>

WORLD CLASS WORCESTERSHIRE: OUR CASE FOR DEVOLUTION



The Summary

October 2015



Cllr. Adrian Hardman
Leader of Worcestershire
County Council



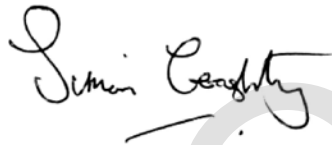
Cllr. Margaret Sherrey
Leader of Bromsgrove
District Council



Cllr. Phil Grove
Leader of Malvern Hills
District Council



Cllr. Bill Hartnett
Leader of Redditch
Borough Council



Cllr. Simon Geraghty
Leader of Worcester
City Council



Cllr. Linda Robinson
Leader of Wychavon
District Council



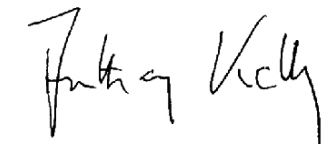
Cllr. Marcus Hart
Leader of Wyre Forest
District Council



Mark Stansfeld
Chairman of
Worcestershire LEP

Bill Longmore
Police and Crime Commissioner,
West Mercia Police

Simon Hairsnape
Chief Officer, NHS Redditch
& Bromsgrove CCG NHS
Wyre Forest CCG



Dr Anthony Kelly
Chair of South Worcestershire
Clinical Commissioning Group

OUR VISION

WELCOME TO WORCESTERSHIRE

Welcome to World Class Worcestershire. We have set high ambitions for our county - to be a world class place to do business and invest in, a world class place to live in, with world class services delivered by innovative public organisations working ever closer together.

This document summarises our compelling case to work with government on a devolution deal for our county to make 2 things happen - faster economic growth and faster, and better, public sector reform.

The purpose of our deal is to help us achieve even more together in Worcestershire. It's about what we, as public sector partners, will be able to deliver through greater local control over decision making and resources, putting us firmly in control of our own destiny. With this in place it means we can go further and faster on our 6 priorities that we know matter most for our communities.

We have a great track record of success in Worcestershire; we are the third best performing economy in the country. We have already committed to creating an extra 25,000 new jobs and add £2.9bn to the economy by 2025, with a massive programme of infrastructure investment including our new Worcestershire Parkway station. These initiatives will help tackle our low wages and improve productivity too, driving benefits not just locally, but nationally. We've taken millions of pounds out of our budgets yet still continue to be rated highly by our residents and maintain good levels of services. But there's more to be done, hence the focus on our six priorities.

OUR 6 PRIORITIES IN SUMMARY

- 1. CONNECTING PEOPLE**
Pioneer a brand new service with a key worker for people most in need, to help people deal with multiple Government and local organisations.
- 2. HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE REFORM**
Bring together health and social care services to tackle the ever increasing costs of our aging population.
- 3. PUBLIC ESTATES**
Deliver the first integrated approach to public sector estates to reduce costs and regenerate our area.
- 4. INFRASTRUCTURE & INVESTMENT**
Support growth and jobs through better infrastructure and new financial tools.
- 5. SKILLS & INNOVATION**
Developing skilled workers and driving innovation in our key growth sectors and business sites.
- 6. ENVIRONMENT**
Valuing what an amazing place we live in and how essential a great environment is to future economic growth.

Our goal is to bring together local services for struggling families and individuals needing support from different government organisations. We will set up a pioneering new service to co-ordinate agencies, making it far better for families under pressure, with a key worker to support people to get the help they need.

TO ACHIEVE THIS WE WILL

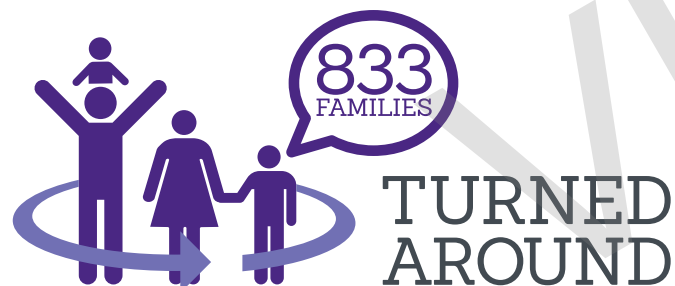
1. **Create a new organisational model** to service delivery to bring partners and organisations together, centred on the person.
2. Incorporate **central Government's procured services within our model**, taking on part of the delivery role in areas like the Work Programme, for those on the highest tariff especially.
3. **Expand the current pathfinder** to cover a wider area to provide more compelling proof that our joined up approach works; this will help other partnerships in other areas to follow our approach.

WHAT WE ASK OF GOVERNMENT

1. We ask for relevant government departments, from the DWP and MoJ to the NHS and RSLs to **become fully engaged partners with the joint entity** and dedicating staff time to the venture.
2. We ask for a **Central Government sponsor to help break down the structural constraints and support the cultural change required** for effective collaboration between local and central agencies.
3. We ask for a **new approach to Work Programme funding**, with Connecting People taking responsibility and funding for the hardest to reach.
4. We ask for government to **commit relevant central departments to work collaboratively** with Connecting People through the sharing of data to identify those most at risk and work within the new model to provide a more complete service.

WHAT THE BENEFITS WILL BE

1. Families and individuals will have a **single service interface** improving the service user experience.
2. Support will be more appropriate, better targeted and **less prone to duplication**.
3. Those most at risk will be identified earlier and **costly emergency interventions avoided**.
4. **Value for money for the Worcestershire £** will be improved through demonstrable cost savings alongside better outcomes.

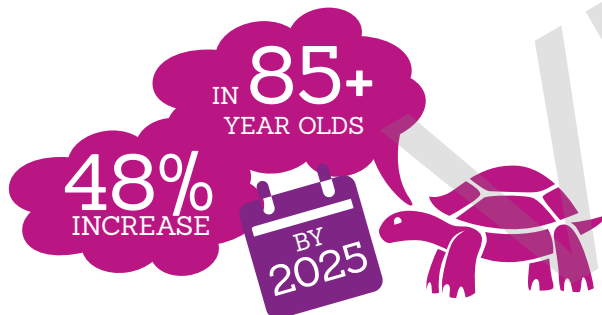


Our goal is to further integrate health and social care services to address the spiralling costs that we face with increasing use of these services, because of our aging population and people with multiple long term conditions. We want to find new ways to commission and deliver the services that our residents need.

TO ACHIEVE THIS WE WILL

Underpinned by our Health and Well-Being strategy, our five year Health and Care Strategy and the NHS Five Year Forward View.

1. **Improve the supporting systems** that underpin our services, including ICT, procurement and back office systems.
2. **Commit to developing a single care record** for both health and care and will continue to strive for better value for money from our contracts.
3. **Work on a more collaborative model of service design** and delivery across health and care; committing to identifying and testing opportunities for integration.



WHAT WE ASK OF GOVERNMENT

1. We ask NHS England to provide a **broker to assist in overcoming the challenges faced as we move to a more collaborative way of working.**
2. We ask for **multi-year funding settlements** for both CCGs and Local Authorities to enable more flexible financial and strategic planning.
3. We ask for **support from the Health and Social Care Information Centre**, working with the Information Commissioner's Office to help adopt of the single care record.
4. We ask for **exemption from the National Lead Provider Framework** for NHS commissioning.
5. We ask for the **acute services review currently being carried out by NHS England to be brought to a conclusion.**
6. We ask for government to allocate an **additional ring-fenced pot of funding for CCGs** to develop new service delivery models. Only fiscally neutral investments would be approved.

WHAT THE BENEFITS WILL BE

1. Long term planning and resource allocation will provide the **flexibility necessary to permit innovation.**
2. A single care record will reduce duplication and help **manage demand** and model improved care pathways.
3. Our approach to bring together **health and social care services in real reform** will provide the blue print for other areas.



Our goal is to deliver the first public sector-wide integrated approach to publicly owned assets to reduce costs, unify services, fuel regeneration and improve value for money for tax payers.

TO ACHIEVE THIS WE WILL

1. Commit to ensuring all authorities in Worcestershire use Place Partnership, by Summer 2016, **to commission and procure estate services.**
2. **Undertake a review of publically held estates owned by government departments** who do not join the venture, to explore opportunities to apply the 'Right to Contest' policy on land with high economic potential.

WHAT WE ASK OF GOVERNMENT

1. We ask that central government commits agencies with land holdings in Worcestershire to **join the Place Partnership by summer 2016.** Suggested agencies include, HCA, MoD, NHS Prop Co, Network Rail and HMCTS.
2. We ask for all **sales of publically held estates in Worcestershire to be brokered through Place Partnership**, working with district partners to complement local plans and grant strategic planning permission. A share of any uplift in the capital receipt as a result of this is retained for use in the Economic Development Fund.
3. We ask for **exemption from stamp duty land tax** on the purchase of land and property from other public sector organisations to reduce the barriers to innovative public sector ventures.
4. We ask for **details of the full public sector asset base** in Worcestershire to be shared with the Place Partnership including information on the status and nature of use where permissible.

WHAT THE BENEFITS WILL BE

1. **Regenerative effects of key sites maximised** through strategic development plans as well as councils' planning and CPO powers.
2. Through co-location of services and operations, **overheads will be reduced**, streamlining management and generating efficiencies.
3. We will provide the **physical infrastructure necessary for our flagship schemes**, such as the Connecting People programme, to thrive.
4. Retention of a share of capital receipts will allow us to safeguard the future of the partnership and **re-invest in initiatives to drive growth locally.**



Our goal is to establish the infrastructure and develop the financial instruments for growth investment through increasing infrastructural capacity and unlocking sites for use in our high value industries.

TO ACHIEVE THIS WE WILL

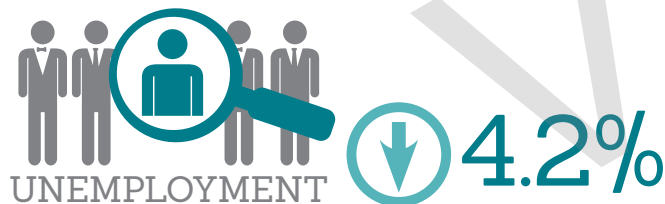
1. We will speed up our work to **understand the key drivers of productivity** in Worcestershire through an enquiry led by the LEP with a strong business focus.
2. We will ensure that our **investment decisions are made with full regard for the stipulations of local plans** with a focus on investment in key assets, including starter homes and ICT connectivity.
3. We commit to **preparing full business cases for investment**, compliant with Treasury Green Book methodologies.
4. We will **augment the existing Local Transport Board** to establish a Strategic Transport Board. This will act as a single interface coordinating Worcestershire priorities and communicating these to Central Government.

WHAT WE ASK OF GOVERNMENT

1. We ask for government to assist in establishing a **Memorandum of Understanding with Highways England and a Duty to Cooperate with Network Rail**.
2. We ask that government **support the Worcestershire LEP's Enterprise Zone bid** with permission for full business rate retention on the identified sites for the next 25 years. This new revenue stream will be used as the basis for the **Worcestershire Economic Development Fund**.
3. We ask for government to **raise the borrowing cap on the Housing Revenue Accounts** to help address the national housing supply shortage and make housing more affordable.
4. We ask that government **bring forward investment in our two priority infrastructure projects, the Carrington Bridge and A38**.

WHAT THE BENEFITS WILL BE

1. **Investment in infrastructure** will cement our position as one of the fastest growing economies in the country.
2. Worcestershire will become a **powerful cog in the Midlands Engine** by investing in the infrastructure necessary to support our high growth sectors.
3. Our single economic development fund will allow us to achieve **better value for money by capitalising on economies of scale**.



Our goal is to build a network for skills provision that delivers first class education and training in our high value growth sectors in advanced manufacturing, agri-tech, cyber security, defence and IT. Upskilling our population will help with our goal to further improve our productivity.

TO ACHIEVE THIS WE WILL

1. We will accelerate growth in our **cyber security sector by developing an industry catapult to support SMEs** in areas like research and development and concept commercialisation.
2. We will work together to **create a University Technical College**, involving local businesses from our priority sectors in the development of course content.
3. We will work with government to take on a wider range of powers, funding and responsibility in areas **such as Further Education and the adult skills budget** in line with government plans.
4. We will continue developing a **framework for an 'Innovation Ecosystem'** to drive a constant stream of high quality investment opportunities for Innovate UK.

OVER  **10,000** NEW APPRENTICES SINCE **2011**

WHAT WE ASK OF GOVERNMENT

1. We ask for **Innovate UK to match the funding from local partners for the creation of a cyber-tech industry catapult and a 12 month joint arrangement with Innovate UK.**
2. We ask that government **commit GCHQ resource to partner with the cyber-tech industry catapult** to ensure a practical, market focus.
3. We ask that government work **with us to ensure our bid for a University Technical College is approved.**
4. We ask that government **fund a pilot programme as part of the continuing development of the Apprenticeship Levy**, offering financial support to encourage higher level, business led apprenticeship programmes in the STEM subjects, and helping SMEs take on more apprentices.
5. We ask that government **commits DWP to working with local employers and skills providers to develop a local employment offer for older workers** who are willing and capable to work.

WHAT THE BENEFITS WILL BE

1. SMEs will find it easier to take on **young learners in the key STEM subjects.**
2. **Our catapult will drive genuine innovation** as a catalyst for growth, raising ambition and the profile of the county at home and overseas.
3. The **new University Technical College** will improve relationships between employers and skills providers, and help people develop their skills needed for our growth sectors.
4. The drag on our economy often attributed to the older population will be turned on its head as we **tap into the productive capacity, skills and experience of older workers.**



Our goal is to value the exceptional environment we have in Worcestershire and make the most of our world class asset as a key component for our economic growth now and in the future.

TO ACHIEVE THIS WE WILL

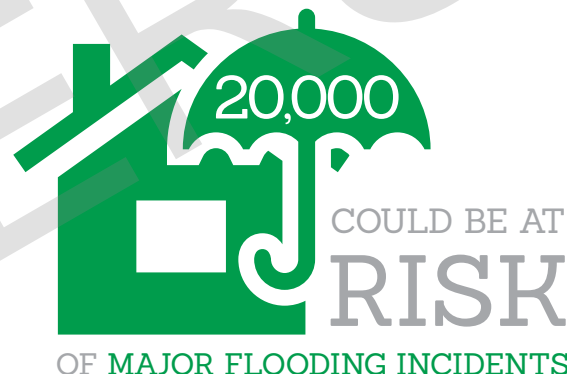
1. We will formalise the role of the **Local Nature Partnership**, giving it greater political status and influence.
2. We will develop an **environmental infrastructure strategy** to prioritise flood defences in response to local needs.
3. We will promote our **exceptional natural environment and quality of life** as a key part of our World Class Worcestershire campaign to attract businesses to locate here.

WHAT WE ASK OF GOVERNMENT

1. We ask for **devolved funding for the Rural Development Programme** through the formation of a partnership with Natural England and Forestry Commission.
2. We ask for **devolved funding for the total flood risk investment available to Worcestershire** to properly allocate the funding according to priorities agreed in partnership with the Environment Agency and the LNP.
3. We ask that government work with Worcestershire County Council, WLEP and Worcestershire Regulatory Services to **identify opportunities for devolved regulatory and licensing powers**.

WHAT THE BENEFITS WILL BE

1. We will be better able to prioritise and **respond to local flood needs** with our local environmental infrastructure strategy.
2. With devolved functions, Worcestershire Regulatory Services will become the **one stop shop for all businesses** to help them meet their statutory obligations, with just one point of contact, helping to reduce red tape.
3. Our marketing campaign for World Class Worcestershire for inward investment will focus on the **business benefits of our exceptional environment**.



SECURING DATA-SHARING BY DEFAULT

Our goal is to develop a culture of data sharing by default, whereby a decision to not share data must be supported by a full case justifying the rationale. We see this as a pivotal outcome which supports all of our priorities and as such have identified improved data sharing as a critical work-stream to run alongside our work on the six priorities.

TO ACHIEVE THIS WE WILL

1. Establish a **cross-agency leadership board** with a focus on moving to data sharing by default across the county.
2. Develop a **data sharing by default strategy for Worcestershire**.
3. Invest in establishing an **innovative new technical platform** which supports our data sharing vision.

WHAT WE ASK OF GOVERNMENT

In addition to our data-sharing related asks of government listed within our priorities we also ask that government considers

1. **Matching the total fiscal outlay required to deliver our strategy** with dedicated expert resource from the Information Commissioner's Office to help break down barriers to data-sharing and create a new model with potential nationwide application.

WHAT THE BENEFITS WILL BE

1. Improved data-sharing will allow us to take a **more pro-active and preventative approach** to service delivery.
2. Triangulating multiple sources of information around problematic bottlenecks will **create opportunities for both savings and unlocking future growth**.



We are not asking to create a super council or unitary council for Worcestershire, that isn't needed here. Our model, to create a Public Sector Leadership Board, will give us a strategic decision making body to oversee our projects that result from devolved powers. It will have wide involvement of partners, with elected representatives able to vote, so that the Board is accountable to residents.

OUR PRINCIPLES

The governance model we adopt must be proportional to the powers and funding being devolved from Westminster. Therefore we believe that negotiations with government will drive our approach as conversations regarding our priorities mature. However, regardless of the degree with which powers are passed down, we consider there to be an underlying set of principles which must lay the foundation for any proposed model of governance.

We look forward to developing the governance conversation further with government as the scope and extent of Worcestershire's ambitions for devolution evolve.

Principles of Governance	Our model suggests
An all-inclusive public sector and local partner strategy forum	Local council leaders, Police and fire services, LEP and central government agency representatives attend the meetings
Accountable decision making through publically elected bodies	Only local council leaders and PCC to vote on final decisions of the board
Accountable project delivery led by a publically elected body	A voting member volunteers to take the lead on delivery on a workstream by workstream basis, and is fully accountable for outcomes
Most simple, streamlined governance structure proportional to devolved powers	No need for further layers of government or new legal entities
Equal partnership (for publically elected bodies)	Every elected bodys vote is equal



WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL
9TH DECEMBER 2015

Review of Polling Places and Polling Districts for Kidderminster Foreign Parish

OPEN	
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor N J Desmond Cabinet Member for Resources
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Ian Miller Ext 2700 Returning Officer & Chief Executive
CONTACT OFFICER:	Alison Braithwaite Ext 2781 Head of Transformation and Communications
APPENDICES:	<p>Polling Places and Polling Districts: Appendix A - Consultation Document – September 2015 Appendix B - Consultation Responses Received – November 2015</p> <p><i>The appendices to this report have been circulated electronically and can also be accessed from</i></p> <p>http://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/the-council/elections-and-voting/electoral-register/polling-districts-and-polling-places.aspx</p>

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To recommend changes following the review of polling places and polling districts within the parish of Kidderminster Foreign.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **The Council is asked to DECIDE that:**

- 2.2 **The changes to the Polling Places and Polling Districts for the parish of Kidderminster Foreign as set out in paragraph 4.5 be made from the elections in May 2016.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places. The last such review in Wyre Forest was undertaken in October 2014 following the publication of the Local Government Boundary's Commission's final recommendations for the Electoral Review of the District. The results of the

polling places and polling districts review were agreed by Council on 10 December 2014. Copies of the report and the decision can be found at www.wyreforest.gov.uk/council/meetings/main.htm

- 3.2 The changes to polling districts and polling places were first used at the Parliamentary and Local elections in May this year. In the Returning Officer's post elections report to Full Council on 29 July 2015, it was reported that from the perspective of electoral administration, all the new polling places offered good facilities in the guise of large rooms, with good or excellent access for disabled people and (in most cases) car parking arrangements that were at least as good as many other polling stations in Wyre Forest.
- 3.3 However, the report highlighted that concern was raised at the candidates and agents wash up elections briefing on 8 July 2015 about how the changes for the Kidderminster Foreign Parish had resulted in a specific impact on the 300 voters living along Northwood Lane, Bewdley. Due to there being no short direct road route to reach the polling place at Shatterford this represents a round trip of almost 15 miles for those electors living at Hill Farm at the far end of Northwood Lane. Also, the electors have to pass their former polling station at Wribbenhall Parish Rooms en route.
- 3.4 It was therefore agreed by Full Council on 29 July 2015 that a polling districts and polling places review should be undertaken for the Kidderminster Foreign parish only (the current WA-KF polling district). The review was undertaken under section 18C(5) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 which allows the Council to carry out at any time a review of a particular polling place or polling district. The review consulted on recreating a polling district similar to the former WR-B polling district (which confusingly used to be known as "Bewdley Wribbenhall No. 2") and designating the Wribbenhall parish rooms as the polling place for that district.
- 3.5 Consultation with the public and key stakeholders commenced on 7 September 2015 and concluded at 5pm on 30 October 2015. A copy of the consultation document was made available on the Council's website, at the Worcestershire Hub in Kidderminster and Wyre Forest House, Finepoint Way, Kidderminster and in the Libraries in Bewdley and Kidderminster. A Public Notice and Press Release were published encouraging residents and interested bodies to submit their views. Full copies of the Polling Places and Polling Districts Consultation Document and the comments received during the consultation period can be accessed from <http://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/the-council/elections-and-voting/electoral-register/polling-districts-and-polling-places.aspx>
- 3.6 Four consultation responses were received from the following stakeholders: The (Acting) Returning Officer - Wyre Forest Parliamentary Constituency; a resident from Hill Farm, Northwood Lane, Bewdley; Kidderminster Foreign Parish Council; and Wolverley and Cookley Parish Council.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 All consultation responses other than the one received from Kidderminster Foreign Parish Council were fully supportive of the proposal that a polling district should be created for the part of Kidderminster Foreign Parish which lies along

Northwood Lane, Bewdley and that electors from that area should vote at Wribbenhall Parish Rooms. There would be no impact on electors for the rest of Kidderminster Foreign, including Trimpley and Low Habberley, who would continue to vote at the Village Hall, Shatterford.

- 4.2 Kidderminster Foreign Parish Council acknowledged that logistically the proposal would make sense for electors from Northwood Lane. However, their specific concerns related to the associated staffing and polling station costs for a by-election or a combined election due to the parish electorate being spilt across two polling stations which would result in double the costs compared to other parish areas which are served by one polling station.
- 4.3 In response to these concerns it should be noted that since 2006 the four yearly parish election for Kidderminster Foreign has not been contested and therefore no costs for polling station or polling station staff have been incurred. During this time there have been no by-elections either. If future elections for this Parish are contested it will always coincide under current electoral arrangements with a District Council election for the Wribbenhall and Arley Ward, which covers the Kidderminster Foreign Parish area. Therefore, any costs will be halved and if other elections are being held on the same day at those polling stations the costs would be reduced even further.
- 4.4 It is also the case that, until 2011, this parish was served by two polling stations, at Trimpley and Wribbenhall, and thus the proposals do not expose the parish council to any greater cost than it faced historically. The combined hire cost of the Parish Rooms at Wribbenhall and Shatterford Village Hall for the May 2015 elections was £200.00, which is lower than the average hire cost across the district of £231.00 for each polling station. In one Parish area of the District, the cost of the polling station is £500.00. Whilst we recognise the concerns raised by Kidderminster Foreign Parish Council about potentially facing costs for two polling stations, the reality is that even if it had to pay 100% of the costs due to, for example, a by-election, the cost is still lower than the average cost that other parish areas are paying. There is no case for treating Kidderminster Foreign Parish Council differently from other parish councils.
- 4.5 The proposed Polling Places and Polling Districts for the Kidderminster Foreign Parish for implementation from the Elections in May 2016 are as follows:**

Name of Ward	Current Polling District	Proposed New Polling Districts	Proposed Polling Place
Wribbenhall & Arley (Kidderminster Foreign Parish area of the ward only)	WA-KF	WA-KF1 (former WR-B polling district covering Northwood Lane area of Kidderminster Foreign)	Wribbenhall Parish Rooms, Kidderminster Road, Bewdley

		WA-KF2 (former WR-C and WR-D polling districts)	Shatterford Village Hall, Arley Lane, Shatterford
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5. NEXT STEPS

5.1 If the proposed changes for this Review are supported by Council, steps will be taken to promote awareness of the change of arrangements for Northwood Lane electors and of the availability and convenience of postal voting.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no new financial implications arising from the proposed changes as set out in paragraph 4.5 as both polling stations are already designated for use at national and local elections for their respective areas.

7. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Section 18B(4)(e) of the Representation of People Act 1983 states the polling place for a polling district must be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they will be able to reach the polling station.

7.2 A polling district is a geographical area created by the sub division of a constituency, ward or division into smaller parts.

7.3 The Electoral Commission uses the following definitions:

- A polling place is defined as the building or area in which a polling station will be selected by the (Acting) Returning Officer.
- A polling station is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place. Unlike polling districts and polling places which are fixed by the local authority, polling stations are chosen by the (Acting) Returning Officer for the election.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

8.1 The recommendation will enable the Council to meet its requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act and subsequent legislation by ensuring that access to polling stations meets the needs of electors.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT

9.1 There are no risk management issues identified with this report.

10. CONCLUSION

10.1 The Council has undertaken a thorough review in consultation with key stakeholders to address the specific impact arising from last December's polling places and polling districts review for electors living in Northwood Lane, Bewdley, which was only identified following the elections in May this year.

11. CONSULTEES

- Cabinet Member for Resources.
- Returning Officer for Wyre Forest.
- Corporate Leadership Team.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Section 18C(5) of the Representation of the People Act 1983
- Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013
- Report to Council on Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places – 10 December 2014
http://www.wyreforest.gov.uk/council/docs/doc49668_20141210_council_agenda.pdf
- Report to Council on Review of the May and June 2015 elections and the Local Advisory Poll – 29 July 2015
http://www.wyreforest.gov.uk/council/docs/doc50194_20150729_council_agenda.pdf

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES IN THE DISTRICT OF WYRE FOREST – PARISH OF KIDDERMINSTER FOREIGN

Executive Summary

1. This consultation paper sets out proposals for some changes to the pattern of polling districts and polling places in the parish of Kidderminster Foreign in the district of Wyre Forest for use at the elections in May 2016 onwards. The proposed changes are detailed in the chart below, and the full proposals are set out in **Appendix A**. Your responses are sought by **5pm on Friday 30 October 2015** – the details of where to send your comments are in paragraph 21.

Name of Ward	Current Polling District	Proposed New Polling Districts	Proposed Polling Place
Wribbenhall & Arley (Kidderminster Foreign Parish area of the ward only)	WA-KF	WA-KF1 (former WR-B polling district covering Northwood Lane area of Kidderminster Foreign)	Wribbenhall Parish Rooms, Kidderminster Road, Bewdley
		WA-KF2 (former WR-C and WR-D polling districts)	Shatterford Village Hall, Arley Lane, Shatterford

Background

2. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places. The last such review in Wyre Forest was undertaken in October 2014 and the results were agreed by Council on 10 December 2014. Copies of the report and the decision can be found at http://www.wyreforest.gov.uk/council/docs/doc49668_20141210_council_agenda.pdf
3. The proposals made in this review involve changes to the current polling district and polling place for the Kidderminster Foreign Parish, as set out in **Appendix A**. This review is undertaken under section 18C(5) of the Representation of People Act 1983 which allows the Council to carry out at any time a review of a particular polling place or polling district. **While the pattern of provision will never be ideal to suit all electors, the proposals try to maximise convenience by using the best locations.**

Definition of terms

4. A 'polling district' is a geographical subdivision of an electoral area such as a District Ward within which a polling place is designated.

5. A 'polling place' is defined as the building or area in which a polling station will be selected by the (Acting) Returning Officer.
6. A 'polling station' is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place. Unlike polling districts and polling places which are fixed by the local authority, polling stations are chosen by the (Acting) Returning Officer for the election.

Requirements of the review

7. It is a requirement of the review to ensure that all electors in the area reviewed have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practical in the circumstances.
8. It is necessary to ensure that, as far as reasonable and practicable, the polling places are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a polling place to have regards to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.
9. Polling places should be within the polling district unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area outside the polling district.
10. The (Acting) Returning Officer is required to decide how many polling stations are needed for each polling place and to allocate electors to the polling stations in such a manner as he thinks most convenient (Rule 25 Schedule 1 RPA 1983).
11. In conducting the review the Council must:
 - Publish a notice that the review is being held.
 - Consult the (Acting) Returning Officer.
 - The (Acting) Returning Officer must make representation to the authority and must include information as to the location of polling stations (existing or proposed) within the polling places.
 - The Council must publish the (Acting) Returning Officer's representations within 30 calendar days of receipt.
 - The Council must seek representation from such persons as it thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. Ensure that any elector in the area may make representations.
 - Representations may be made by any person in connection with the review including proposals for specified alternative polling places.
 - Publish the findings of the review including reasons.
12. On completion of the review, the Council must give reasons for its decisions and publish:
 - All correspondence sent to the (Acting) Returning Officer in connection with the review.
 - All representations made by electors and other persons and bodies, including those with expertise in relation to premises and facilities for disabled persons.
 - Details of the designation of polling districts and polling places within the parish of Kidderminster Foreign as a result of the review.

Arrangements made for 2015

13. A breakdown of the overall turnout figures for the Parliamentary and District elections held in May 2015 against the previous comparable elections is set out in Table 1. The changes in the electoral ward boundaries as set at http://www.lgbce.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/23508/Wyre-Forest-alternative-FINAL-report-POST-EDITOR-2014-10-14.pdf resulted in new polling districts and polling places for the elections in May 2015 which means that a direct comparison of turnout on a ward basis is not possible.

Table 1

Turnout %	2010	2015	% Difference in Turnout
General Parliamentary Wyre Forest Constituency	66%	64%	↓ 2%
Wyre Forest District Council	65.6%	63.9%	↓ 1.7%

14. Steps will continue to be taken by the Electoral Registration Officer to conduct campaigns to increase the number of people who register to vote and to remind people of different methods available for voting.

15. An analysis of the cost per elector at each polling station used for the Parliamentary, District and Parish elections held in May 2015 was published in a report to Wyre Forest District Council on 29 July 2015 which can be seen at this link: http://www.wyreforest.gov.uk/council/docs/doc50194_20150729_council_agenda.pdf

16. There is also clear evidence that the convenience of being able to complete a vote at home, on a day and time that suits the voter, results in higher participation rates. For the District elections in May 2015, 10,934 postal votes were issued and 9,355 were returned, a participation rate of 85.5%. This contrasts with turnout among other voters in polling stations, which ranged from 43.59% to 76.16% and with an average of 63.9%.

Comments received and issues emerging since May 2015

17. Following the elections in May 2015 comments were received from the public and elected Members on some of the changes to the pattern of polling places and polling districts following the decisions on the last review in December 2014.

18. On 29 July 2015 these comments were considered by Council. It agreed to carry out a polling district and polling place review for the parish of Kidderminster Foreign only. Nearly 300 voters live along Northwood Lane but are within the Kidderminster Foreign Parish. Their allocated polling station as a result of the 2014 polling places and polling districts review is now at Shatterford. For electors living at Hill Farm at the far end of Northwood Lane, this represents a round trip of almost 15 miles as there is no short, direct road route to reach the polling place at Shatterford. They also have to pass their former polling station at Wribbenhall Parish Rooms en route. The consultation paper

during last year's review of polling districts and polling places did not identify the significant impact on this group of electors.

19. The proposal is therefore, in effect, to recreate the old WR-B polling district which covers the Northwood Lane residents and to designate the Wribbenhall Parish Rooms as the polling place for that district. There is no suitable polling place that can be designated in the polling districts. This new polling district would be known as WA-KF1. The remainder of Kidderminster Foreign parish would be designated as polling district WA-KF2 and Shatterford Village Hall would continue to be designated as the polling place for electors from this part of Kidderminster Foreign.

The review and where to send your comments

20. **Appendix A** contains the proposals for changes that are now being proposed in this review. Comments are sought from local electors and interested organisations about these proposals.
21. **Comments should be emailed to electoral@wyreforestdc.gov.uk or made in writing to the below address to arrive no later than 5pm on Friday 30 October 2015.**

By post to:

Mr Ian Miller

Electoral Registration Officer

Wyre Forest District Council

Wyre Forest House

Finepoint Way

Kidderminster

Worcestershire

DY11 7WF

22. Final recommendations, taking into account the (Acting) Returning Officer's comments and representations made during the consultation period, will be made in a report to Full Council on Wednesday 9 December 2015. Council will be asked to consider and approve the recommendations.

7 September 2015

Appendix A

WARD: WRIBBENHALL & ARLEY (only the Kidderminster Foreign Parish area of the Ward)

Current Polling District(s)	Current Polling Place	Name of Ward	Proposed Polling District(s)	Proposed Polling Place	Proposal	Reasons
<p>WA- KF (Kidderminster Foreign Parish)</p> <p>(in 2014 this area was covered by the following individual polling districts WR-B, WR-C, WR-D)</p>	<p>Shatterford Village Hall, Arley Lane, Shatterford</p>	<p>Wribbenhall & Arley</p>	<p>WA-KF1 (former WR-B polling district covering Northwood Lane area of Bewdley)</p>	<p>Wribbenhall Parish Rooms, Kidderminster Road, Bewdley</p>	<p>To split current polling district. Change of Polling Place.</p>	<p>There is a specific impact on the current arrangements for the 300 voters living in Northwood Lane, Bewdley as there is no short, direct road route for them to reach their current polling place of Shatterford Village Hall, which represents a round trip of almost 15 miles for those voters living at the far end of Northwood Lane.</p> <p>The proposal is, in effect, to recreate what was the former polling district of WR-B (before the 2014 Polling Places and Polling Districts review) and to designate Wribbenhall Parish Rooms as the polling place for that polling district, which will be known as WA-KF1.</p> <p>The proposed Polling Place is a suitable venue with good access and parking and was the former Polling Place for WR-B voters. The road distance between the proposed Polling Place and those voters living <u>at the far end</u> of Northwood lane is 2.3 miles. Therefore for the majority of voters the distance will be less than 2 miles.</p>

Agenda Item No. 12

			WA-KF2 (former WR-C and WR-D Polling Districts)	Shatterford Village Hall, Arley Lane	No change to the remainder of the polling district following the above proposed split. No change in Polling Place.	Following the above split of the Polling District, it is proposed the remainder of the Polling District (covering the former Polling Districts of WR-C and WR-D) will remain unchanged but would be known as WA-KF2. It is not proposed to change the current polling place of Shatterford Village Hall. The venue has good access and parking. The road distance between the midpoint of the polling district and Shatterford Village Hall (via Trimpley Lane) is 1.8 miles.
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End of consultation document

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

POLLING PLACES AND POLLING DISTRICTS CONSULTATION FOR THE PARISH OF KIDDERMINSTER FOREIGN

**Responses received for the consultation
period Monday 7 September 2015 to
Friday 30 October 2015**

***(Personal data in the responses has
been removed where it is connected to
an individual)***

Alison Braithwaite

Subject: Polling District and Polling Place Review - Kidderminster Foreign Parish

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: 07 September 2015 18:27

To: Alison Braithwaite

Subject: Re: Polling District and Polling Place Review - Kidderminster Foreign Parish

Many thanks Alison.

I am sure it will be much appreciated by all electors off Northwood Lane and Hill Farm.

Regards,

[REDACTED]

Resident of Hill Farm, Bewdley

From: Kidderminster Foreign Parish Clerk
Sent: 22 September 2015 11:26
To: Wyre Forest Electoral
Cc: Alison Braithwaite
Subject: Re: Polling Districts and Polling Places Consultation - Parish of Kidderminster Foreign

Thank you for consulting us in respect of proposed changes to the Polling Station provision for our parish - Kidderminster Foreign.

Whilst, logistically, it would seem to make sense for electors from the Northwood Lane area of our parish to be allocated as voters for our parish at the Wribbenhall polling station, we would make the following observations and request clarification:-

- 1) In the event of a by-election, we are concerned at the costs to be allocated to our parish for payment - viz - twice the number of premises, twice the staff, and with two venues - extra printing costs.
- 2) Even if not a by-election, the costs of an ordinary parish election alongside District, County or National elections will still be greater if our electorate is spread across more than one polling station.
- 3) We are one of only a couple of rural parishes which, following the former "rationalisation" exercise, now no longer have a polling station within our own parish area. As it is, all of our parishioners have to travel outside of our parish to vote. This came about when Wyre Forest decided to close the polling station allocation at Trimpley Village Hall. You are now asking us not only to carry on voting outside of the parish, but also increasing the cost to the parish to do so.
- 4) In light of the above facts, could Wyre Forest District please confirm that there will be no additional cost to Kidderminster Foreign Parish if some of the electorate for our parish are allocated to Wribbenhall polling station, and that this will apply, not only to ordinary elections, but also in the event of a bye-election?

Your response - particularly to 4) above - would be appreciated.

Regards
Elsie Whitehouse
Clerk to Kidderminster Foreign Parish

**FROM THE (ACTING) RETURNING OFFICER, WYRE FOREST PARLIAMENTARY
CONSTITUENCY**

Ian Miller
(Acting) Returning Officer
Wyre Forest Parliamentary Constituency
Wyre Forest House, Finepoint Way
KIDDERMINSTER
DY11 7WF

tel: 01562 732700
fax: 01562 732790
email: ian.miller@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
my ref: IRM/psreview1

7 October 2015

Dear Alison,

**CONSULTATION ON POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES - PARISH OF
KIDDERMINSTER FOREIGN**

Thank you for consulting me about this review. I am replying in my role as (Acting) Returning Officer for the Parliamentary constituency of Wyre Forest.

I agree with the proposal that a polling district should be created for the part of Kidderminster Foreign parish which lies along Northwood Lane, Bewdley and that electors from that area should vote at the Parish Rooms, Wribbenhall. There would be no impact on electors for the rest of Kidderminster Foreign, including Trimpley and Low Habberley, who would continue to vote at the Village Hall, Shatterford.

My views on the proposed polling districts are identified as follows:

Proposed polling district	Comment
WA-KF1 (former WR-B polling district covering Northwood Lane area of Kidderminster Foreign)	<p>I support the designation of the Parish Rooms at Wribbenhall as the polling place for this part of the Kidderminster Foreign Parish. Nearly 300 voters live along Northwood Lane. Those living at Hill Farm (at the far end of Northwood Lane) have a 15 mile round trip to their current polling place at Shatterford as there is no short, direct road route. They also have to pass the Parish Rooms at Wribbenhall en route to Shatterford which used to be the polling place for this group of electors, prior to the polling places and polling districts review in 2014. The Parish Rooms at Wribbenhall provide a suitable venue with good access and parking, and can easily accommodate additional voters from this part of Kidderminster Foreign. The road distance between the Parish Rooms and those voters living at the far end of Northwood Lane is 2.3 miles. Therefore for the majority of voters the distance will be less than 2 miles.</p> <p>I also support the creation of the new polling district (WA-K1) to underpin the proposed change to the polling place.</p>

<p>WA-K2 (former WR-C and WR-D polling districts)</p>	<p>I agree with the proposal not to change the current polling place of Shatterford Village Hall for the other electors within Kidderminster Foreign Parish including Trimpley and Low Habberley. Shatterford Village Hall has good access and parking. The arrangements for electors to use this polling place at the 2015 elections worked successfully, and help to make the polling station more cost effective. The road distance between the midpoint of the polling district and Shatterford Village Hall (via Trimpley Lane) is 1.8 miles.</p> <p>I also support that this polling district will now be known as WA-K2, due to the area in Northwood Lane forming a new polling district.</p>
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As required by the legislation, I set out information in the appendix about the location and numbers of polling stations that I would propose, if the polling places set out in the consultation paper were confirmed. I look forward to being notified on the Council's decisions about this review in due course.

Yours sincerely,



Ian Miller
(Acting) Returning Officer, Wyre Forest Parliamentary Constituency

Appendix

Polling District	Polling Place (As set out in the Council's Consultation Document)	Proposed Location and Number of Polling Stations
Wribbenhall & Arley		
WA-KF1 (former WR-B polling district covering Northwood Lane area of Kidderminster Foreign)	Wribbenhall Parish Rooms, Kidderminster, Bewdley	Suitable room in the polling place. One polling station. In order to provide the most cost effective arrangements, the polling station would not be solely for this polling district but would also serve other parts of the Wribbenhall & Arley ward.
WA-KF2 (former WR-C and WR-D polling districts)	Shatterford Village Hall, Arley Lane, Shatterford	Suitable room in the polling place. One polling station. In line with current arrangements, the polling station would also serve polling districts WA-UAS and WA-UAV.

Alison Braithwaite

Subject: Polling Districts and Polling Places Consultation - Parish of Kidderminster Foreign

From: Wolverley and Cookley Town clerk

Sent: 16 October 2015 11:32

To: Wyre Forest Electoral

Subject: Polling Districts and Polling Places Consultation - Parish of Kidderminster Foreign

At the last meeting of Wolverley & Cookley Parish Council the above consultation was discussed and the Parish Council were in support of the proposals.

Kind Regards,

Mrs Bev Drew

Clerk to Wolverley & Cookley Parish Council



<http://www.wolverleyandcookleyparishcouncil.org.uk>

Wolverley and Cookley Town clerk

 Please don't print this email unless you need to.

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL
9TH DECEMBER 2015

POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK
MATTERS WHICH REQUIRE A DECISION BY COUNCIL

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE LICENSING & ENVIRONMENTAL
COMMITTEE – 5TH OCTOBER 2015

Purpose of Report

To consider recommendations from the Licensing and Environmental Committee on matters outside the policy framework or approved budget of the Council.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Would Councillors please note that the related reports and documents have not been included in the Council book, as they have already been sent to Members via the Licensing & Environmental Committee agenda. A public inspection copy is available on request. The policy documents, referred to below, have been posted on the Council's website.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL	CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEE
Gambling Act 2005 Revised Statement of Principles Review Consultation Results Recommend to Council: The revised Statement of Principles 2016-2019 attached at Appendix 2 of the report to the Licensing and Environmental Committee, subject to typo graphical errors being amended, be approved and published.	Councillor J Hart

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL
9TH DECEMBER 2015

POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK
MATTERS WHICH REQUIRE A DECISION BY COUNCIL

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –
5TH NOVEMBER 2015

Purpose of Report

To consider recommendations from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on matters outside the policy framework or approved budget of the Council.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Would Councillors please note that the related reports and documents have not been included in the Council book, as they have already been sent to Members via the Overview & Scrutiny agenda. A public inspection copy is available on request. The policy documents, referred to below, have been posted on the Council's website.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL	CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEE
<p>Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy Mid-year Review Report 2015/16</p> <p>Recommend to Council to:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To approve the Treasury Management Mid-year Review and updated Prudential Indicators. 	<p>Councillor H E Dyke</p>

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL
9TH DECEMBER 2015

POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK
MATTERS WHICH REQUIRE A DECISION BY COUNCIL

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET – 10TH NOVEMBER 2015

Purpose of Report

To consider recommendations from the Cabinet on matters outside the policy framework or approved budget of the Council.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Would Councillors please note that the related reports and documents have not been included in the Council book, as they have already been sent to Members via the Cabinet agenda. A public inspection copy is available on request. The policy documents, referred to below, have been posted on the Council's website.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL	CABINET MEMBER
<p>Council Tax Reduction Scheme Review 2016/17</p> <p>Recommend to Council that from 1st April 2016:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The exceptional hardship fund is retained to support claimants who are unable to pay their council tax liability due to financial hardship; 2. The technical changes outlined in paragraph 3.4 of the report are adopted in the Council Tax Reduction Scheme; 3. The capital limit be reduced from £16,000 to £12,000; 4. The minimum payment required by all working age claimants be increased to 20%, on the basis that the Council is not minded to review the level of contribution again for the period before 2019-20. <p>The equality impact assessment is attached at pages 47 to 55 of this bundle. <u>Councillors must read the assessment before they attend the meeting on 9th December, as they have to have to regard to the public sector equality duty in taking decisions on amendments to the council tax reduction scheme from April 2016.</u> The Cabinet report which explains the background to the recommendations is attached at pages 56 to 63 of this bundle. The detailed responses to the consultation exercise can be seen on page 72 onwards at this link to the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:</p>	<p>Councillor S J Fearn</p>

<p>http://www.wyreforest.gov.uk/council/docs/doc50424_20151105_o_and_s_agenda.pdf</p>	
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Full Equality Impact Assessment- EIA

An EIA is a way of finding out if:

- Our services are accessible to service users and employees.

An EIA helps us to make sure that:

- Our functions and policies do not have a negative impact or discriminate in any way against any members of our local community.

A Full EIA needs to work through the following stages:

- ⇓ **Establish clear aims & objectives-** What is the purpose? Who will benefit? What are the intended outcomes?
- ⇓ **Consideration of data & information-** National & local data; service data; satisfaction/feedback data; complaints; research
- ⇓ **Assessing the impact-** Who does/does not use service? Have you consulted? Does it reflect varied needs of community?
- ⇓ **Reviewing/Scrutinising the impact-** Is there a differential impact on different groups? Is it adverse? Is it directly or indirectly discriminatory? *Show justification if applicable*
- ⇓ **Addressing the issues-** Measures to alleviate impact; alteration to policy; action plans
- ⇓ **Formal consultation-** Use appropriate methods; consult those affected or with legitimate interest; consult widely; ensure consultation is open, inclusive & accessible
- ⇓ **Making a decision-** Explain decision & intended effects/benefits; monitor any actions
- ⇒ **Publication of results-** Accessible & user friendly; add website & intranet; notify consultees

Name of service or policy being assessed	Proposals to change the level of support available under the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2016/17		
Directorate	Chief Executive	Is this a new or existing service or policy?	New/ Existing
Officers completing the assessment	Lucy Wright-Revenues, Benefits & Customer Services Manager	Director	Ian Miller-Chief Executive
Date	October 2015	Relevant Cabinet Member	Cllr Sara Fearn-Cabinet Member for Transformation & Change

<p>Establish clear aims & objectives What is the purpose and expected outcomes?</p>	<p>The Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) provides assistance to people on low incomes to help them pay their council tax.</p> <p>When council tax benefit was abolished and replaced by localised council tax schemes in 2013, central government protected pensioners with a view that they are unable to take advantage of employment and unable to alter their financial situation. Our current scheme was introduced in 2013 and meant all working age claimants had to initially pay 8.5% of their council tax liability, which rose to 10% in 2014.</p> <p>The proposed scheme will continue to protect pensioners who will get the same level of council tax support as they do now. The proposals for 2016/17 are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the amount of capital people are allowed to have before no longer being eligible to receive support from £16,000 to £12,000. • Make technical changes to the way the awards are calculated changing from a reduction in entitlement where the percentage is taken off the award figure to a cut in council tax liability before entitlements are calculated (moving from bottom slicing to top slicing). • Allowing CTRS claims to be backdated at management discretion. • Reducing the minimum award from £5 per week to 50p per week (this would provide more support to claimants who currently receive no support if their weekly entitlement is between 50p and £4.99). • Increasing the minimum council tax contribution required from working age claimants from 10% to 20%
<p>Will there be any effect on other council procedures or strategies e.g. Corporate Plan or the <u>council's workforce</u>?</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Are there any statutory requirements or implications?</p>	<p>The Local Government Finance Act prescribes details of the scheme to be used for pension age applicants under the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Prescribed Requirements) Regulations 2012. Certain aspects of the scheme for working age applicants are also included within those regulations.</p>
<p>Are there any other organisations / bodies involved?</p>	<p>None</p>

<p>Consideration of data & information National & local data; service data; satisfaction/feedback data; complaints; research that is being used</p>	<p>Due to changes made by central government from 2013 all local authorities were required to create a local scheme to replace council tax benefit. If the Council wish to consider making any changes to the scheme, there is a legal requirement to undertake a consultation.</p> <p>The Council has consulted on a range of options including whether or not to make changes to the existing scheme to make the financial savings required by all preceptors. If no changes are made to the scheme, opinion was sought as to how the council could make the required savings including increasing council tax for all households, using reserves or cutting/reducing existing services.</p> <p>The consultation ran for 12 weeks from 6th July to 27th September 2015. Posters were displayed in our customer service centre and staff were asking customers to comment, press releases were issued, it was displayed on the home page of our website, emails were sent to our partners asking them to promote it, it featured in our largest housing associations residents' magazine and several reminders were posted on our social media sites. Forecasting was undertaken based on data from the existing caseload.</p>
<p>Assessing the impact Who does/does not use service? Have you consulted? Does it reflect varied needs of community?</p>	<p>All households are liable to pay council tax. However the level of financial support they receive is up to the Council to decide under their local scheme regulations.</p> <p>The current scheme provides 100% support for low income pension age claimants and 90% support for low income working age claimants, meaning all working age households have to pay a minimum of 10% of their council tax bill.</p> <p>There is a Cabinet recommendation to Council to reduce the level of support for all working age claimants meaning all working age households would have to pay a minimum of 20% of their council tax bill.</p> <p>The current Council Tax Reduction Scheme caseload is approximately 8,785. 50% of claimants are working age so the impact would be felt by approximately 4,387 households.</p> <p>The following table is based on the current caseload of working age claimants who will be affected by any changes.</p>

	Number of working age cases	% of working age caseload
Band A	2,352	53.61%
Band B	1,381	31.48%
Band C	464	10.58%
Band D	125	2.85%
Band E	41	0.93%
Band F	13	0.29%
Band G	9	0.21%
Band H	2	0.05%
Total working age claimants	4,387	

We currently have 12 cases with total capital between £12,000 and £16,000 that would be affected by reducing the capital limit to £12,000.

We currently have 3,534 cases (81% of our working age caseload) receiving the maximum 90% award. The remaining 853 Cases (19% of our working age caseload) receive a partial entitlement.

What impact does the service / policy / project have on the nine protected characteristics as defined by the Public Sector Equality Duty 2010 – for definitions, please see overleaf.

Reviewing/Scrutinising the impact

Is there a differential impact on different groups? Is it adverse? Is it directly or indirectly discriminatory? Show justification if applicable

<p>1. Age</p>	<p>Negative <u>Evidence:</u> While the changes will impact negatively on working age claimants as pensioners are protected the impact is not considered to be significant. This is based on findings from our neighbouring authorities who have implemented similar schemes where a minimum payment of 20% has been required. The retention of a discretionary exceptional hardship fund that will support low income working age claimants will mitigate the impact on working age households that are unable to pay the liability. Current caseload shows that 51% of our caseload is working age and 49% are pensioners. The scheme means that all working age claimants have to pay at least 10% of their liability, possibly increasing to 20% depending on the decision by full Council in December 2015.</p>
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<p>2. Disability</p>	<p>Negative <u>Evidence:</u> Working age disabled people will also be negatively affected. This is because they are believed to be disproportionately represented within the working age caseload and are currently required to pay at least 10% of their liability (potentially increasing to 20%). In addition, people with disabilities are less likely to have the same opportunities and access to work that would improve their financial situation. The retention of a discretionary exceptional hardship fund will support low income working age claimants, including those with disabilities that will mitigate the impact on claimants that are unable to pay their liability.</p> <p>Positive <u>Evidence:</u> The Council recognises the barriers disabled people face and seeks to address them by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • awarding additional premiums for disablement • disregarding higher levels of income where a claimant with a disability is working • there is no requirement to have non dependant deductions where the claimant is disabled and in receipt of DLA (Care), Personal Independence Payments (Daily Living Component), Attendance Allowance or registered blind.
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<p>3. Gender Reassignment</p>	<p>Positive/Negative <u>Evidence:</u> No impact</p>
<p>4. Marriage and Civil Partnership</p>	<p>Positive/Negative <u>Evidence:</u> No impact</p>
<p>5. Pregnancy and Maternity</p>	<p>Positive/Negative <u>Evidence:</u> No impact</p>
<p>6. Race</p>	<p>Positive/Negative <u>Evidence:</u> No impact</p>
<p>7. Religion or belief</p>	<p>Positive/Negative <u>Evidence:</u> No impact</p>
<p>8. Sex</p>	<p>Positive/Negative <u>Evidence:</u> No impact</p>
<p>9. Sexual orientation</p>	<p>Positive/Negative <u>Evidence:</u> No impact</p>
<p>Other e.g. Deprivation, health inequalities, urban/rural divide, community safety.</p>	<p>Negative <u>Evidence:</u> Council Tax Reduction is a means tested discount that is available to low income households. It is on this basis that all working age recipients would be at a socio-economic disadvantage in particular lone parents, part-time workers and carers. The retention of a discretionary exceptional hardship fund that will support low income working age claimants will mitigate the impact on working age households that are unable to pay the liability.</p> <p>Positive <u>Evidence:</u> The present scheme applies a discount only if a claimant's weekly award is £5.00 or above. Any award under £5.00 means the claimant will not receive support. The recommended change reduces the minimum entitlement to 50p per week which will mean more claimants will be eligible for support.</p>

<p>Can any differential impact be justified? (e.g. promoting equality of opportunity)</p>	<p>Y</p>	<p>N</p>	<p><u>Evidence</u> When creating the local scheme, the Council have given due regard to central government's stipulation that people of pension age must be protected. In a public consultation undertaken in 2012, the principle of 'Every household with working age claimants should pay something' was agreed by 84% of respondents and this became a principle embedded into our scheme. A further consultation was undertaken in 2015 and there were no objections raised to this principle which ensures a degree of fairness as it applies across all groups who are of working age. The scheme is devised to incentivise working age people to seek employment. For those who are in severe hardship or unable to increase their income, the Council manages a discretionary hardship fund to support them following a detailed review of the individual's and household's circumstances.</p>	
<p>Does any adverse impact amount to unlawful discrimination?</p>	<p>Y</p>	<p>N</p>	<p><u>Evidence</u></p>	
<p>What alternative actions could be taken to mitigate any adverse impact? <i>(add these to the action plan)</i></p>	<p>Continuation of the exceptional hardship fund to support those in financial need.</p>			
<p>Addressing the issues</p> <p><i>Measures to alleviate impact; alteration to policy; action plans</i></p> <p>ACTION PLAN</p>				
<p>Impact</p>	<p>Action required</p>	<p>Lead Officer</p>	<p>Timescale</p>	<p>Comments</p>
<p>Financial pressure applied to low income families</p>	<p>Ensure all staff promote applications for the exceptional hardship fund to provide support to those in financial need</p>	<p>Lucy Wright</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	

Agenda Item No. 13(c)

	Continuously monitor the impact of the changes together with take up of the exceptional hardship fund.	Lucy Wright	Monthly	Monthly analysis of collection rates for CTRS caseload
	Report the number of applications/awards made against the exceptional hardship fund to Overview & Scrutiny Committee	Lucy Wright	September 2016	Report to include expenditure to date to ensure adequate financial provision is made
Action Plan to be reviewed:	Date November 2016			

Formal Consultation	
What formal consultation has been undertaken?	Public consultation held in 2012 and 2015 as detailed above
Making a Decision	
Explain decision & intended effects/benefits; Can the service/policy proceed?	The Council was required to replace council tax benefit with a local scheme with the requirement that pensioners are to be protected. It is inevitable that there will be negative equality impacts. As a result however this is mitigated by the creation and continued use of an exceptional hardship fund
How will the service/policy / actions be monitored and reviewed? <i>(please give timescale)</i>	Continuous and ongoing monitoring of council tax collection rates with specific reference to CTRS claimants, numbers of reminders & summonses issued and number of exceptional hardship applications
Publication of results	
Accessible & user friendly; add website & intranet; notify consultees	To be published following full Council decision after 9 th December 2015
Signed Lucy Wright – Revenues, Benefits & Customer Services Manager	Date 21 st October 2015
Agreed by Director of Service Ian Miller – Chief Executive	Date 23 rd October 2015

Prior to the Equality Act 2010, there were 3 separate public sector equality duties covering race, disability and gender. The Equality Act 2010 replaced these with a new single equality duty covering the following protected characteristics:

Protected characteristics: definitions

Age - where this is referred to, it refers to a person belonging to a particular age (e.g. 32 year olds) or range of ages (e.g. 18 - 30 year olds).

Disability - a person has a disability if s/he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Gender reassignment - The process of transitioning from one gender to another.

Marriage and civil partnership - marriage is defined as a 'union between a man and a woman'. Same-sex couples can have their relationships legally recognised as 'civil partnerships'. Civil partners must be treated the same as married couples on a wide range of legal matters.

Pregnancy and maternity - pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth, and is linked to maternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, and this includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.

Race - It refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins.

Religion and belief - religion has the meaning usually given to it but belief includes religious and philosophical beliefs including lack of belief (e.g. Atheism).

Sex - a man or a woman.

Sexual orientation - whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET
10TH NOVEMBER 2015

Council Tax Reduction Scheme Review 2016/17

OPEN	
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor S Fearn, Cabinet Member for Transformation and Change
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Revenues, Benefits & Customer Services Manager
CONTACT OFFICER:	Lucy Wright Ext 2948
APPENDICES:	None

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides information to the Cabinet following the recent consultation to make changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2016/17.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to RECOMMEND to Council that from 1 April 2016:

- 2.1 The exceptional hardship fund is retained to support claimants who are unable to pay their council tax liability due to financial hardship;**
- 2.2 The technical changes outlined in paragraph 3.4 below are adopted in the Council Tax Reduction Scheme;**
- 2.3 The capital limit be reduced from £16,000 to £12,000;**
- 2.4 The minimum payment required by all working age claimants be increased to 20%, on the basis that the Council is not minded to review the level of contribution again for the period before 2019-20.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 On 23rd June 2015, the Cabinet agreed to undertake a public consultation to obtain feedback on various options to change the current Council Tax Reduction Scheme from 2016/17.
- 3.2 Consultation ran for 12 weeks from 6th July to 27th September 2015 and a total of 117 responses were received.
- 3.3 The first part of the consultation asked respondents whether they agreed to change the current scheme to make financial savings. For those that selected “no”, opinions were sought as to how the Council should make savings. Those who agreed to change the scheme were asked for their opinion on various options outlined below.

3.4 The consultation proposed making technical changes as follows:

- Changing from a reduction in entitlement where the percentage (10% under our current scheme) is taken off the award figure to a cut in council tax liability before any entitlements are calculated. This will be at a percentage rate to be agreed following consultation. Such a change would bring that element of the scheme in line with the vast majority of councils and in particular with Wychavon, Redditch and Bromsgrove
- Reducing the minimum award of Council Tax Reduction from £5 per week to 50p per week in line with housing benefit minimum entitlements. Such a change would benefit some claimants who are entitled to support but in practice receive nothing as their weekly award is less than £5
- Allow backdating of awards at the Council's discretion in line with housing benefit regulations

3.5 The consultation asked respondents for their views on whether to increase the minimum council tax payment for all working age claimants from 10% to either 15% or 20%.

3.6 Opinions were sought as to whether the amount of capital/savings allowed should be reduced from £16,000 and asked respondents to make suggestions as to an appropriate limit.

3.7 The final question asked opinions regarding the retention of an exceptional hardship fund for tax payers experiencing financial hardship.

3.8 Detailed results of the consultation were reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5 November and a summary of the responses is outlined below.

Table 1 Summary of consultation responses

Number of responses received via the consultation portal: 115 however not everyone who responded answered every question.

Organisations that provided a named response:

Worcestershire County Council support changes to optimise council tax income whilst balancing this with the needs of lower paid families.

The Children's Society provided a 5 page response and do not support any increase to the scheme given the recently announced changes through the Welfare Reform and Work Bill that 'will have a damaging effect on the income of families with children' and request that the 'Council see the decision they take in the wider context of these families lives and not in isolation'. They also request that care leavers receive 100% council tax reduction until they reach the age of 21.

() represents the number of respondents.

Q1. Do you agree the council should change the current Council Tax Reduction Scheme to help make savings?					
<i>115 answers</i>					
Yes	56%		No	29%	Don't know 15%
Number of comments received – 20					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The scheme helps those in need (particularly those who go out to work on a low income) and to increase the amount they have to pay would put them in greater hardship (14) • 'Poor people' already get rent subsidised, why give them more reason not to work (1) • We all have to contribute (1) • Not enough information to make a decision (2) • This is not guaranteed income if people can't afford to pay (1) • I work with vulnerable people across Worcestershire – Wyre Forest is one of the most needy areas (1) 					
Q2. If there is no change to the scheme, how should the Council make savings?					
<i>47 answers</i>					
	Yes	No	Don't know	Total	
Increase council tax for all households	57%	30%	13%	37	
Use the Council's reserves	50%	29%	21%	34	
Reduce funding for other services	44%	34%	22%	41	
Q3. If there is no change to the scheme, what is your preference to make the savings? 1 is the option most preferred and 3 is the least					
<i>47 answers</i>					
	1	2	3	Total	
Increase council tax for all households	58%	12%	30%	40	
Use the Council's reserves	25%	55%	20%	34	
Reduce funding for other services	24%	34%	42%	41	
Q4. Do you support the proposed changes to the way the calculations are made (technical changes)?					
<i>96 answers</i>					
Yes	52%		No	31%	Don't know 17%

<p>Number of comments received – 9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would like more avenues explored that would save the Council money (3) • This negatively affects those who work on low wages and does not incentivise people to remain employed (2) • The system works as it is – why change it? (2) • Everyone should contribute regardless of income (1) • Disabled persons should not be treated as normal working age people (1) 						
<p>Q5. If the level of support was reduced, what should the minimum payment be? 82 answers</p>						
15%	38%		20%	27%	Don't know/Other	35%
<p>Number of comments received – 18</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not increase the minimum payment and leave it at 10% (18) 						
<p>Q6. Do you agree the level of savings/capital limit should be reduced? 77 answers</p>						
Yes	57%		No	33%	Don't know	10%
<p>Q7. How much should the savings/capital limit be before support is stopped? 77 answers</p>						
£6,000	34%		£12,000	35%	Other	31%
<p>Number of comments received for 'Other' – 24</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No change £16,000 (9) • £10,000 or below (7) • £11,000 - £50,000 (5) • Above £50,000 (3) <p>Additional comments received – 15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If someone has savings, they should not be asking for financial help (5) • Wrong to penalise those with savings (4) • Difficult to decide (2) • Should be £12,000 for a couple and £6,000 for a single person (1) • This is the only option that does not affect the poor (2) 						
<p>Q8. Do you agree to the council maintaining a hardship fund? 77 answers</p>						
Yes	68%		No	23%	Don't know	9%
<p>Number of comments received – 9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support should be available for helping those who need it (6) • Should be used so disabled and pensioners don't have to pay council tax and should not be discretionary (1) • Unaware scheme existed (1) • Difficult to answer without knowing how it is used (1) 						

Q9. Any other comments to add?			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to do a full impact study to understand overall implications of those less able to pay. • Use a residency test like Sandwell <i>[this has been ruled illegal by the courts therefore it is not an option]</i> • Include some disregarded income such as child benefit/child maintenance. • Increase council tax on empty and second home to 150%. • Apply a benchmark for living costs based on the family structure then everyone contributes – a percentage income. And allow more payment dates so people can pay weekly or monthly as their circumstances allow. • This support needs to continue as without it some people struggle. 			
Q10. Are you in receipt of Council Tax Reduction Scheme?			
Yes	20%	No	80%

4. **KEY ISSUES**

4.1 In order to make alterations to local council tax schemes, legislation requires any changes are approved by 31st January prior to implementation on 1st April each year. Key dates in the timeline are as follows:

- 10th November 2015 -Cabinet receive report from Scrutiny and make final recommendations to Council.
- 9th December 2015 – Council approve changes to the scheme
- 1st April 2016 – Changes to Council Tax Reduction Scheme are implemented

4.2 The responses to the consultation show the following:

- 56% said “yes” to changing the scheme to make savings
- 15% selected ‘don’t know’

4.3 A summary of those who selected ‘don’t know’ or ‘yes’ to change the scheme is as follows:

- 52% support making the proposed technical changes to the scheme
- 57% support altering the maximum level of capital limits
- 68% support the continuation of an exceptional hardship fund

4.4 33 people did not support changing the scheme and were not given the detailed options of how the scheme could be changed.

4.5 The recommendations outlined in this report comply with the original principles of the scheme that was set up in 2013 as follows:

Principle 1 Every household with working age claimants should pay something;

Principle 2 The scheme should incentivise people into work;

Principle 3 People with greater amounts of savings receive less support;

Principle 4 Protection will be provided through a Hardship Fund to those who are least able to pay; and

Principle 5 The scheme will be in support of the Council's Corporate Plan Priorities of an increased supply of good quality and decent homes in which people can afford to live.

4.6 There is a range of options on each of the issues raised in the consultation, including making no change to current arrangements, implementing technical changes and increasing the minimum contribution. If the changes are implemented they would complement the overall package of welfare reform that seeks to encourage work and delivers fairness for people who are paying the full amount of council tax. Increasing the minimum payment to 20% would strengthen the incentive to look for work or seek higher paid work/more hours balanced with the continuation of supporting claimants through the exceptional hardship fund.

4.7 This report proposes that Cabinet makes the following recommendations to Council in respect of changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme from 1st April 2016:

a) Retention of the hardship fund, to ensure that people who face genuine difficulty in meeting their commitments can be assisted. This support is not available to people who have savings, for example;

b) Implement the technical changes outlined in paragraph 3.4;

c) Reduce the capital limit to £12,000 (in other words, anyone with savings in excess of that sum would not be eligible for support);

d) Increase the minimum council tax contribution to be made by working age people to 20%, on the basis that the Council's policy position is that it wants stability and is therefore minded neither to make a series of incremental changes nor to review the minimum contribution rate in the medium term.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Council and all preceptors continue to face significant financial challenges to meet savings targets in order to meet the impact of continued reductions in government grants

5.2 The financial implications of the recommended approach have been forecast and are shown in the following table. This table includes the potential extra income for Wyre Forest District Council that would be generated by the changes, which is estimated to be in the region of £60,000.

Scheme variation	Annual additional council tax income	Annual additional council tax income for WFDC
20% Top slicing (50p minimum award)	£461,000	£60,000
£12,000 Capital limit	£10,000	£1,300

Notes

The current scheme is 10% bottom slicing with £5 minimum entitlement. The estimates in the table assume 100% collection rate

- 5.3 All preceptors have benefited from the savings made from the Council Tax Reduction Scheme as detailed in the Cabinet report of 23rd June 2015. As the major preceptor, Worcestershire County Council (WCC) has agreed to provide the district council with approximately £75,000 per annum from April 2016 as outlined in their response to the consultation. This additional income will replace the current funding contribution from WCC of £25,000 per annum which is match funded by the district council and will be used to maintain the exceptional hardship fund and the impact of collection rates will be closely monitored.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The legal requirement to consult on any proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme has been completed and this report provides a summary of those responses for consideration by the Cabinet.
- 6.2 In reaching final decisions, the Cabinet will have to have regard to its duties under the Equality Act 2010 as the proposed options apply to all potential working age recipients of council tax reductions. Consideration will need to be given to other relevant legal requirements, such as the duty to co-operate in reducing child poverty in accordance with section 21 of the Child Poverty Act 2010.
- 6.3 The final decisions should also seek as far as possible to be consistent with the Council's corporate plan priorities.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 An initial equality impact assessment has been undertaken and, due to the negative impact on age, people with disabilities and poverty within the district, a full equality impact assessment has been undertaken. The negative equality impacts have been identified and can be mitigated by the continuation of the exceptional hardship fund for those affected.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 Increasing the minimum payment of council tax across all working age claimants is likely to see a reduction in the Council's collection rates. In addition, working age people already in financial hardship will be required to pay more from 2016/17.
- 8.2 These risks can be mitigated by closely monitoring the collection rates, particularly against those in receipt of Council Tax Reduction. The Council's exceptional hardship fund will also mitigate the impact for working age people in severe financial

hardship and this will be actively promoted across all front line teams to support claimants to apply for help when needed.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The Council has to make significant savings and proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme as outlined in the consultation could potentially generate up to about £60,000 per year.
- 9.2 The ongoing level of the exceptional hardship fund will be kept under review and the annual contribution from the County Council used to provide additional support to the required level.
- 9.3 Given the contribution to our budget pressures and increased incentive for claimants to seek work or more work if possible, Cabinet are asked to recommend to Council that the changes suggested in this report, are implemented from 1st April 2016.

10. CONSULTEES

- 10.1 On this report: Cabinet and Corporate Leadership Team
- 10.2 Through the consultation exercise: Members of the public and other interested bodies
- 10.3 Overview and Scrutiny Committee is considering the recommendations in this report at its meeting on 5 November 2015. Its comments will be reported separately.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Council Tax Benefit Reform, Overview and Scrutiny Committee 8th November 2012
Council Tax Benefit Reform, Cabinet 12th November 2012
Council Tax Benefit Reform, Council 21st November 2012
Welfare Support Fund, Cabinet 23rd June 2015

Detailed information on the current council tax reduction scheme can be found at www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/counciltax

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
9th DECEMBER 2015**

HALF-YEARLY REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 I will concentrate on an overview of the issues facing the district and the Council; key actions being implemented against the priorities in the corporate plan for 2014-19; and the progress that we have made in transforming the Council.

2. Overview of the issues facing the district and the Council

- 2.1 The most significant issue facing the Council remains its financial position. The Cabinet's proposals for the medium term financial strategy will be considered at its meeting on 22 December. The Comprehensive Spending Review on 25 November gave little detailed information about Wyre Forest: more will emerge before Christmas in the provisional local government settlement for 2016-17. In advance of the detail, it is risky to offer precise projections. However there is good reason for thinking that the Council will need to continue to draw on its general reserves over the next three years and that the scale of savings required in the third year of the strategy (2018-19) will be the best part of £1m. The prediction I made in February that - whatever the result of the May elections - the administration would not be able to avoid some difficult decisions was correct.
- 2.2 The results of the May and June elections saw the Conservative group having 23 of the 33 seats on the Council. What follows is not a party political observation, as it would hold true if any other party was to enjoy such a position. The clear election results assist with strategic planning for the future as there can be reasonable confidence that the overall control of the Council is unlikely to change until at least 2018.
- 2.3 In line with the strategic issues identified in my report in February 2015, I have focussed my time on:
- Developing and delivering the “enhanced status quo” model;
 - Overseeing implementation of actions under the organisational development strategy, including further efforts on staff engagement;
 - Options for future savings including driving service redesign and on-line services;
 - Wyre Forest House;
 - Community governance review;
 - Preparing for elections in May, including review of polling districts and places;
 - Horizon-scanning, including work on Wyre Forest's position in respect of future

— devolution within England e.g. joining a combined authority.

- 2.4 The last three mentioned items have dominated the period since February. Together with the Leader and other colleagues, I have been heavily involved in work on devolution in both the West Midlands and Worcestershire. The administration's conclusion at the beginning of September - that Wyre Forest District Council would not be making an application to join the proposed West Midlands Combined Authority as a non-constituent member at this stage – has allowed the effort to focus on Worcestershire. There is a report about the devolution proposals for Worcestershire on tonight's agenda.
- 2.5 As returning officer, I gave a full report to Council in July on the elections held in May and the countermanded poll in one ward that was held in June. Electoral activity has not slackened. Apart from the first full canvass under individual electoral registration, there was a by-election for the Blakebrook & Habberley South ward in September and a poll will be held on 17 December for the vacancy in the Stourport-on-Severn county electoral division. Next May will also be exceptionally busy with the first elections to Kidderminster Town Council, Rock parish council elections, 11 seats being contested on the district council, West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner elections and possibly a referendum on a neighbourhood plan.
- 2.6 The decisive result of the local advisory poll in May has allowed the Council to proceed confidently with the creation of a town council for Kidderminster. Following Council's agreement to the reorganisation order at its meeting in September, the town council came into existence on 1 December when it held its first meeting. A considerable amount of work had been done in preparing for that meeting in order to ensure that the town council commenced its work on a sound footing. In accordance with the reorganisation order, I will continue to convene the town council until its annual general meeting in May although I hope the burden will be lifted somewhat by the appointment of a clerk and responsible financial officer: the post is being advertised before Christmas. I would like to thank several staff from the Council who have assisted me as part of a project team that I have led on preparations for the creation of the town council. I would also extend my thanks to officers of the Kidderminster Charter Trustees who have provided helpful advice and support. The work has included drafting of lengthy draft agreements that it is proposed to enter between the town council and this Council in respect of the Town Hall and a range of services. They seek to secure sustainable services through partnership working, including continuation of the Town Hall as a successful events venue, while also delivering the target for cost reductions that the District Council wishes to see as a result of the creation of the town council. I hope that the two councils will be in a position to finalise the agreements no later than February in order to give certainty to their financial planning for 2016-17.
- 2.7 The national picture in respect of the impact of dealing with the UK's financial deficit continues to give concern. The Comprehensive Spending Review has confirmed that there will be significant reductions in Government grant for local government, with revenue support grant due to be eliminated altogether in 2020 when councils will be allowed to keep all the income from business rates.

However this is not as generous as it might seem. Additional responsibilities are to be passed to councils, including perhaps responsibility for funding housing benefit for pensioners. Nor do the Government's proposals involve a power for councils to alter business rates except downwards; and thus the only growth that might be enjoyed will come from growing the local economy and seeing either more businesses and/or increased rateable values. New homes bonus will continue for the next four years but is to be reduced to help spending pressures in social services authorities. This tends to reduce the incentive for district councils in particular to support housing growth. That said, the overall picture is that it is essential for the medium term financial strategy to continue to grow the Council's income streams, by growing the domestic and business tax base (more houses, more businesses and more successful businesses) and by other methods, such as selling services and generating income from the Council's assets.

2.8 Growing income has been one of the three main levers that the Council has been using successfully to align its expenditure with income over time. The others will also need to continue:

- a) Making the Council as efficient as it can be in its structures and external and internal processes. This is driven through the Wyre Forest Forward transformation programme, supported by the ICT strategy and by work to ensure that services are on line and "digital by default";
- b) Implementing alternative delivery structures where this represents best value. Examples include the shared services that have been implemented since 2010 and the Council's strong track record in localism, shifting responsibility for assets and services to local organisations, including town and parish councils.

3. Key actions implemented against the priorities set in the corporate plan

3.1 Since my last report in February 2015, the focus has been on implementation of previously agreed changes and projects. We have continued to see good progress on a number of other fronts by the Corporate Leadership Team and I would like to record my thanks to Mike Parker, Linda Collis, Caroline Newlands and Tracey Southall. I am pleased that this report is able to refer to a number of major steps that have been taken:

- a) There has been **significant progress in achieving the target for savings in the previous medium term financial strategy** including the Wyre Forest Forward transformation programme. The total target was £1.5m in the current financial year rising to £2.3m in 2016-17. The latest estimate of savings is that about 90% of these challenging targets have already been met across all three years. The Council has continued its strong track record on financial management, producing an underspend of £260k for 2014-15 (which would have been £550k if it had not been for significant business rate refunds as a result of inaccurate valuations by the Valuation Office Agency, dating back to 2010);

- b) good progress with the **construction of the new leisure centre by Pellikaan Construction on behalf of Places for People, saving an estimated £500k a year**. The higher level of savings is because the borrowing has been undertaken at rates significantly lower than had been projected in the business case. The new centre is due to open in July 2016, when the existing sites in Kidderminster and Stourport will close and be available for redevelopment. The Stourport site is being actively marketed and a contract has been let for a master plan for the Kidderminster Eastern Gateway, which includes the site of The Glades;
- c) we have **continued to embed our efforts to generate more income from our services, activities and assets**. Significant additional income was generated in 2014-15 from depot-based services, cultural and arts events and so on, with the Museum successfully hosting its first wedding. At Wyre Forest House, income from tenancies and ICT support has grown from virtually nothing 12 months ago to over £160k a year, with further interest being expressed by the private sector in additional rentals. We will continue to maximise the income that is generated from assets and services;
- d) **significant progress continues to be made with regeneration of the district**. To highlight only a few examples since my report in February: Specsavers has unveiled very welcome plans to invest at the redundant Romwire site, adjacent to Wyre Forest House; Aldi has secured permission for a supermarket at the entrance to the Silverwoods development, doubling its investment and contribution to jobs in Kidderminster; and Oakleaf's new depot was opened in September. Alongside Amtek's significant investment in its site on Stourport Road, the importance of this employment corridor to the district's economy has been underlined. The investments provide compelling recognition of the benefits of investing and expanding in Wyre Forest. We are still the only district in Worcestershire with an up-to-date local development plan, and have already taken the first steps in reviewing it. The local development order for South Kidderminster Enterprise Park was renewed in August for a further 3 years. Works to improve the public realm with the creation of Exchange Square and improvements to Vicar Street and High Street are largely complete following successful joint working with the County Council. Work on phase 2 of the Hoobrook link road is well under way and expected to be completed during 2016;
- e) we have **continued to review and streamline internal processes** to make the Council as efficient as possible and reduce cost. Work under the Wyre Forest Forward transformation programme continues. The second stage of the review of financial processes is under way; and the significant cross-cutting review relating to human resources is producing changes that simplify systems and support the organisational development strategy that was put in place in 2014.

4. Looking ahead

- 4.1 The Council continues to face significant challenges over the coming period. Despite their magnitude, I continue to feel confident that Councillors and our staff will rise to meet them, and that the Council will continue to demonstrate its ability to provide effective community leadership. Finally I would like to thank members and others for the support that I have received.

**Ian Miller
Chief Executive
December 2015**