

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER**

**24TH FEBRUARY 2016 (6.51PM)**

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**Present:**

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

**C.63 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Rayner.

**C.64 Declarations of Interests by Members**

Dispensation be granted to Councillors N J Desmond, J Hart, M J Hart, N Knowles, D Little and T Onslow to enable them to participate in the consideration of a motion submitted under Standing Orders relating to the Housing and Planning Bill.

**C.65 Minutes**

**Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

**C.66 Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

**C.67 Questions**

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

Councillor T Muir left the meeting at 6.53pm and returned at 6.54pm.

**1. Question from Councillor S Harrington to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration**

Who decided to focus on a music based heritage trail, rather than the carpet industry?

**2. Question from Councillor S Harrington to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration**

Why have the town centre improvement works taken so long, with the inherent costs involved i.e. labour costs?

**3. Question from Councillor S Harrington to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration**

Who checks to see work is carried out in a reasonable time frame?

**4. Question from Councillor S Harrington to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration**

Who checks to see that work is carried out to the required standard?

**5. Question from Councillor S Harrington to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration**

Is it feasible to replace record seating with original seats we believe are now in store, or new seats reflecting carpet industry?

**Answer to all questions from the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration**

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration responded that he presumed it was Kidderminster Town Centre the questions related to and replied it was the Council that had decided on a music heritage trail following consultation from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. The reason why the town centre improvements have taken so long is that the Council needs to get it right. The works are checked by a team of professional experts who are overseeing the project on behalf of the Council.

**Supplementary question from Councillor S Harrington**

Many Members of the public have come to me to say they think it's a bit of a mess although I support what has been done in the town. There are obviously problems so as you tell us somebody is checking it, what are the remedial works if they are checking it?

**Answer from the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration**

The reason it has taken so long is because we are determined that it will be finished to the right standard. It has taken us a long time to find the money

to be able to do it and therefore I am determined it will be finished to a standard of exceptional quality and we have already seen a large area of the square outside T J Hughes relaid. I indeed will not rest until we are satisfied that the work is to the standard we originally set out in the consultation and the Members briefing that was held.

Like the leisure centre, which has been overseen by the Leader and will be delivered on time, it's an excellent example of the Conservatives delivering within timescales but Kidderminster town centre is a difficult project. We haven't seen it go the way we would like but instead of saying we'll accept less than best, we're saying no, it will take longer and hope you will agree with me that it is worth that gamble. I do agree with some of the comments on the Kidderminster Shuttle online, some are spot on and to quote kiddyharrier1, "we need to build for future generations, please continue with future leisure investment, the town needs a leisure park like so many other towns to keep the younger generations here". There is another comment "they could stand by and do nothing but although they won't and it's not always the correct decision, we will not stand still, they are trying to invest in the town and bring a much more modern feel".

That's what we are trying to do and I hope you would agree with me that it's better to get it right and on time but ultimately if we can't achieve both, it's better to get it right.

**6. Question from Councillor N Knowles to the Leader of the Council**

Does the Leader of Council feel embarrassed at telling the people of Wyre Forest that Wyre Forest District Council will enjoy a Council tax freeze for 2 years when he and his team at County Hall – Clee, Campion, Desmond, Hart, Hingley, Muir and Yarranton will be voting for a 4% Council tax increase for Council tax payers of Worcestershire which includes all of those in Wyre Forest whom they told would not have a Council tax increase for 2 years and would he now like to publicise the Worcestershire County Council tax increase of 4% and the Conservative voting record at County Hall.

**Answer from the Leader of the Council**

The short answer is no. Why on earth would I feel embarrassed about imposing a council tax freeze on our electorate for 2 years, it's something we committed to in our manifesto last year leading up to the 2015 elections. That was in the Conservative newsletters, that's the reasons why there are 23 this side of the chamber. Nice of you to say some of our Conservative county colleagues are in my team, but when you say that I would now like to publicise the Worcestershire County Council increase by 4%. Let's be factually correct, 3.9%, which I accept is nearly 4% but made up of a council tax increase of 1.94% and a social care levy which will appear differently on council tax bills of 2% and the county council and its financial position with social care, looked after children and vulnerable adults, it is an wholly different place from this Council. Will I publicise the voting record? I'm sure he was watching the webcast on 11<sup>th</sup> February when the budget debate

was held in public, it was publicised in the council agenda, and for the public record it was a named result so frankly what a ridiculous thing to say.

**Supplementary question from Councillor N Knowles**

Hope he would admit the reason for all these shenanigans about doing things, people voting one way here and voting other way at county is because of tremendous cutbacks and wondered if he would comment on that Wyre Forest is actually being punished doubly.

**Supplementary answer from the Leader of the Council**

The letters in last week's Kidderminster Shuttle say they can't trick us and refers to it as being sleight of hand and tonight we have shenanigans, you can't trick electorate either. Yes, there are of course very tremendous government reductions, ones that are necessary to balance the books which your government left us in.

Councillor Arnold left the meeting at this point, 19.02pm.

**7. Question from Councillor S Harrington to the Leader of the Council**

Does the leader support The Promoting of Fundamental British Values in our Schools in line with National Government?

**Answer from the Leader of the Council**

Yes I do

**Supplementary question from Councillor S Harrington**

If he does, will he write to schools in our borough and ask them to fly the union jack and sing the national anthem in assembly?

**Supplementary answer from the Leader of the Council.**

Education is not a matter for the district council, it is a matter for county council. It's really not my place as Leader of the Council to write to schools. Some of you are school governors and I'm sure Councillor Harrington is one, and perhaps they can use their influence to raise the matter. Whilst I have a personal view on such matters, I will leave those to myself and it's not something I am proposing to do.

**C.68 Chairman's Communications**

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

The Chairman informed Members that he had attended parish council meetings

in the area, and advised that parish councils were happy for the support.

He announced that he was holding a charity ball on 1<sup>st</sup> April at the Granary and welcomed everyone.

He also thanked those councillors that would no longer be standing at the end of the municipal year, they had served the council well. He thanked everyone for the help he had received.

**C.69 Leader's Announcements and Report**

The Leader's report was circulated and Members were advised that Worcestershire would be taking about 50 refugees in 2016. He did not know how the split would happen. Worcestershire devolution had been slightly delayed because the meeting with the Secretary of State had been postponed.

He was delighted to announce that Wyre Forest House continued to generate external income and new tenants had moved into the building. The Corporate Leadership Team would be moving out of their office suite to offices on the ground floor.

**C.70 Motions Submitted Under Standing Order No. D1 (1)**

Two motions had been received in accordance with Standing Orders (Section 7, 4.1).

**1. Motion received from Councillor J Shaw, Labour Group on Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership**

Councillor S Arnold came back to the meeting at this time, 7.09pm.

Councillor Shaw took members through the motion and stated that the council should not put out council services out for tender. He had been contacted by a member of the public to bring the item to council so the Local Government Association could be lobbied. He was seeking support from Council because the Labour Group valued public services and not those of American corporate companies.

A debate took place and upon a vote the motion was defeated.

Councillor S Fearn left the meeting at 7.27pm and returned at 7.29pm.

**The following motion received from the Labour Group on Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership not be agreed:**

Council notes the trade negotiations known as "TTIP" taking place between the European Union and the United States of America.

Council is concerned about the possible implications for the delivery of public services, including those for which local authorities have responsibility,

should the negotiations result in an agreement.

Council understands that consideration is being given to a proposal to require local authorities to put out to tender any service which a private company would seek to run.

Council opposes this proposal and urges the Local Government Association to make strenuous representations to all relevant agencies for its removal.

**2. Motion received from Councillor J Shaw, Labour Group on Housing and Planning Bill**

Councillor Shaw explained his motion and stated that some rental properties were not fit for human habitation in that some had serious damp problems, broken boilers and dangerous wiring. Figures from Shelter showed that 1 in 3 private rented homes did not meet the required standard.

A robust debate took place. Some Members felt that the majority of landlords did follow the law with regard to renting properties with others saying that as a local authority the Council ensure the landlords are answerable to their tenants.

Upon a vote, the motion was defeated.

Councillor J Baker left the meeting at 7.57pm and returned at 7.59pm.

**The following motion received from the Labour Group on Housing and Planning Bill not be agreed:**

**Council notes that there are 6,000 socially rented, and 5,500 privately rented, properties in Wyre Forest.**

**Council notes also that, of the three usual types of house tenure, owner occupied, socially rented and privately rented, it is privately rented properties which have the highest proportion of houses requiring significant repairs, or are actually unfit for human habitation.**

**Therefore council views with dismay the failure of an amendment to the Bill which would have required private landlords to offer for rent only those properties which are fit for human habitation.**

**Council considers that decent housing is a basic element of civilised living. While it acknowledges that local authorities have the power to designate homes unfit for human habitation, it considers that the law should expect private landlords to attain a “fitness for human habitation” standard in the first instance.**

**Therefore, Council requests the Local Government Association to**

**continue to make representations on this matter, even if the Bill is passed into law without this requirement**

**C.71 Urgent Motions Submitted Under Standing Order No. D1 (7)**

There were no urgent motions.

**C.72 Policy and Budget Framework**

**a. Recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 4<sup>th</sup> February 2016**

- **Treasury Management Strategy 2016/17**

Councillor J-P Campion and T Onslow left the meeting at 8.03pm.

Members were reminded to attend the training as everyone was responsible for investment decisions, it was a decision of full Council.

Councillor J-P Campion came back to the meeting at 8.04pm and Councillor T Onslow came back to the meeting at 8.05pm.

A Member stated that officers had a lot of knowledge to pass onto Members at the Treasury Management Review Panel meetings and the training was well worth attending. The meetings consisted of looking at how the Council operated its cashflow and management in short term investments but also highlighted some of the financial constraints the Council faced.

**Decision:**

- 1. The restated Prudential Indicators and Limits for the financial years 2016/17 to 2018/19 included in Appendix 3 of the report to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee be approved. These have been revised, as per paragraph 7.3 of the report to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, following any changes to the Capital Programme brought about as part of the budget process.**
- 2. The updated Treasury Management and Investment Policy and Strategy Statements for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 (the associated Prudential Indicators are included in Appendix 3 and the detailed criteria is included in Section 10 and Appendix 5 of the report to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee) be approved.**
- 3. The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement that sets out the Council's policy on MRP included in Appendix 1 of the report to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee be approved.**
- 4. The Authorised Limit Prudential Indicator included in Appendix 3**

**of the report to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee be approved.**

**C.73 Financial Strategy 2016-2019**

Council considered the Council's budget for 2016-19 having considered the proposed decision and budget reports recommended to Council by Cabinet on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2016 including:

- Fees and Charges
- Three Year Budget, Capital Programme and Policy Framework 2016-19
- Council Tax 2016-19
- Report of the Chief Financial Officer in respect of Sections 25 – 28 Local Government Act 2003
- Efficiency Strategy

Councillor G Ballinger left the meeting at this point, 8.13pm.

The Cabinet Member for Resources took Members through the budget and advised Members that the future direction was clear, there was less money and the council needed to be lean, efficient and self sufficient. Thanks to the administration and Wyre Forest Forward, the council were well on its journey. Moving to one office location had saved money and closing the aging leisure centres and providing one new centre for the district would also contribute to saving money.

Councillor G Ballinger came back to the meeting at 8.16pm.

Councillor J Aston left the meeting at 8.16pm and returned at 8.20pm.

Members were informed that it was only right and proper to freeze council tax which offered fairness to residents. With regard to economic regeneration, last years budget had drawn up plans for Worcester Street in Kidderminster with £500K from capital and this had been match funded by Worcestershire County Council. There would be wider redevelopment of the eastern side of Kidderminster town centre and this would help generate the town centre and help traders in Worcester street.

Councillors would continue to receive their community leadership money of £1,000 each and this was vital in helping the community.

There would be a new £50K localism fund to promote work and local organisations, a function that would contribute to the council's objectives.

Savings would continue to be made to protect front line services, the future would be challenging. The Treasurer, Chief Executive and the Corporate Leadership Team were thanked for their continued help and advice.

The Leader of the Council reiterated the comments made by the Cabinet Member for Resources and stated that the regeneration of Worcester Street was very important as was the localism fund for parishes.



Councillor Knowles moved an amendment by the Labour Group and informed members that the community leadership fund was not required and would rather see the money distributed in another way.

Councillor G Yarranton left the meeting at 8.27 pm and returned at 8.30pm.

A robust took place on the amendment with members stating that the £1,000 community leadership fund did not go into members bank accounts, it was distributed to worthwhile projects across the Wyre Forest district.

Councillor Henderson left the meeting at 9.01pm and returned at 9.04pm.  
Councillor D Little left the meeting at 9.14pm and returned at 9.16pm.

A named vote on the Labour amendment was recorded as follows and the amendment was defeated:

For (2):

Councillors: N Knowles and J Shaw

Against (29):

Councillors: J Aston, J Baker, G W Ballinger, R Bishop, J-P Champion, S J Chambers, 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, A T Hingley, D Little, T A Muir, F M Oborski MBE, J Phillips, C Rogers J D Smith, S J Williams, G C Yarranton, K Henderson, L Henderson and T L Onslow.

Abstained (1):

Councillors: S Arnold

A named vote on the substantive budget proposal was records as follows and was agreed:

For (29):

Councillors: J Aston, J Baker, G W Ballinger, R Bishop, J-P Champion, S J Chambers, 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, A T Hingley, D Little, T A Muir, F M Oborski MBE, J Phillips, C Rogers J D Smith, S J Williams, G C Yarranton, K Henderson, L Henderson and T L Onslow.

Against (3):

Councillors: S Arnold, N Knowles and J Shaw.

**Decision:**

**1. THREE YEAR BUDGET, CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND POLICY FRAMEWORK 2016-19**

- 1.1 The updated Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016-19 be approved.**
- 1.2 The Cabinet Proposals – taking into account the impact on the Council’s Capital and Revenue Budgets for 2016-19 as shown in Appendix 3 of the report to Council be approved.**
- 1.3 The fees and charges in line with the Strategy and the impact on the Council’s Revenue Budget for 2016-19, as shown in Appendix 4 of the report to Council be approved.**
- 1.4 The Capital Programme and Vehicle, Equipment and Systems Renewal Schedule as set out in Appendix 2, Parts 1 and 2 of the report to Council be approved.**
- 1.5 Any Final Accounts savings arising from 2015-19 over and above the target allowed for in the Council’s Financial Strategy be approved, together with surplus Earmarked Reserves, be allocated by the Chief Financial Officer in consultation with the Leader.**
- 1.6 The Efficiency Strategy 2016-19 as set out in Appendix 6 of the report to Council with delegated authority to the Cabinet to insert and update a table with a detailed list of projects, the cost of each project, the estimated savings and actual savings delivered be approved.**
- 1.7 Approval be granted so that the Cabinet may assign up to £100k of capital receipts in each of the three years commencing in April 2016 for transformation costs that deliver efficiency savings be approved; and delegates to the Cabinet decisions on the allocation of funding for transformation projects from capital receipts.**
- 1.8 The General Fund Revenue Budget be approved including all updates from the position in December 2015 and also the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2016 as set out in the report to Council.**

**2.2 COUNCIL TAX**

- 2.2.1 The Council Tax for Wyre Forest District Council on a Band D Property at £205.36 for 2016-17 (£205.36 2015-16) which represents a freeze on Council Tax from 2015-16 be set.**

**2.2.2 The provisional Council Tax on a Band D Property in 2017-18 of £205.36 and £209.34 in 2018-19, being a freeze in 2017-18 and an increase of 1.94 % in 2018-19 over 2017-18 be endorsed.**

**2.2.3 The Chief Financial Officer's opinion on the budget proposals, recommended by the Cabinet in this report, as detailed in Appendix 5 of the report to Council be noted.**

**C. Council Tax 2016-17**

Council considered the formal resolution for setting the Council Tax for 2016-17. The amount of Council Tax depends on the budget proposal recommendations from Cabinet to Council on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2016 which includes the precepts by Worcestershire County Council, The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia and Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority.

A named vote on the Council Tax resolution was recorded as follows and was agreed:

For (32):

Councillors: S Arnold, J Aston, J Baker, G W Ballinger, R Bishop, J-P Champion, S J Chambers, 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, A T Hingley, N Knowles, D Little, T A Muir, F M Oborski MBE, J Phillips, C Rogers J D Smith, S J Williams, G C Yarranton, K Henderson, L Henderson, T L Onslow and J A Shaw.

**Decision: The formal Council Tax Resolution 2016-17 at Appendix 1 of the report to Council, taking into account information contained in Appendices 2 to 5 of the report to Council be approved subject to final validation of rounding of information contained in Appendices 2 to 5 of the report to Council.**

The meeting ended at 9.31 p.m.