

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL

HELD REMOTELY

21ST APRIL 2021 (6PM)

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**Present:**

Councillors: S Miah (Chairman), J Aston (Vice-Chairman), G W Ballinger, C J Barnett, J F Byng, S J Chambers, A Coleman, R H Coleman, B S Dawes, N J Desmond, H E Dyke, P Dyke, C Edginton-White, N Gale, S Griffiths, I Hardiman, P Harrison, M J Hart, K Henderson, L J Jones, A L L'Huillier, N Martin, F M Oborski MBE, T L Onslow, M Rayner, C Rogers, S E N Rook, J W R Thomas, A Totty, L Whitehouse and P W M Young.

**C.76 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: V Caulfield and D R Sheppard.

**C.77 Declarations of Interests by Members**

No declarations of interests were made.

**C.78 Coronavirus pandemic – Temporary continuation of remote meeting arrangements**

Council considered a report from the Chief Executive which proposed to continue with remote meeting arrangements for the period to 31 July 2021 as a proportionate public health response to the serious and imminent threat to public health which is posed by the incidence and spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). In line with decisions taken by the Council on 21 April 2020, the temporary changes are required to eliminate the need for non-essential face-to-face contact whilst still allowing transparent and participative decision-making to take place.

The Leader of the Council presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval. He said the proposals to continue with remote meeting arrangements for the period to 31 July 2021 was a proportionate public health response to COVID-19. He said it was welcome news locally that infection rates had fallen and the numbers of people in hospital and sadly losing their lives had also reduced sharply in recent weeks.

He explained that the Council chamber at Wyre Forest House was simply not large enough to allow for adequate social distancing during a period

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when there will still be legal restrictions on the size of gatherings both inside and outside, and not all adults have yet been offered a first vaccination.

He said the issue had been discussed by group leaders last month and there was a clear consensus not to move the meetings to large, unwieldy spaces. He added that there was no support for the Council to prevent members from attending a face-to-face meeting or to adopt some of the other suggestions from the Government, such as delegating the Council's decisions to officers or to small committees of members.

The Leader said it would be preferable if there was explicit legislation about remote or hybrid meetings, and we do not yet have the ruling from today's court case. However, in the circumstances it was responsible for the Council to carry on eliminating the need for non-essential face-to-face contact whilst still allowing transparent and participative decision-making to take place. He said the Council had to strike a balance between the COVID legislation and its other duties, including under health and safety legislation.

He added the proposals set out in the report continue with some aspects of the temporary changes to the constitution that Council agreed on 21 April 2020 and would apply for the period to 31 July 2021 only.

In conclusion, he said the annual meeting would be held remotely, as scheduled, on 12 May 2021. The Council would revert to its "normal" arrangements for the end time of meetings at 10pm and for motions and questions that applied prior to 21 April 2020. So, there would be up to 30 minutes for questions including the ability to ask a supplementary question. The other minor changes to the consultation that were agreed last April would continue as well.

The Deputy Leader seconded the proposals. She said that the Council had to continue to take the necessary precautions, as it would not be an ideal situation to have one meeting spread across a number of rooms.

Councillor S Chambers joined the meeting at 6.10pm

The Leader of the Conservative group, Councillor M Hart, said that the group would be supporting the recommendations. He said they particularly welcomed the proposals for reverting back to "normal" arrangements regarding the end time of meetings and the ability to ask a supplementary question. He said in his view there was no point in having a hybrid model. It would be farcical for everybody to be in different rooms at Wyre Forest House. Therefore the group is prepared to support dealing with the matter by full Council in May and July being held virtually until we can revert to safe face-to-face meetings.

The vote was carried unanimously.

**Decision: Council AGREED the following temporary changes to its**

**Constitution which would apply until 31 July 2021:**

- (a) the revised Section 7: Council Procedure Rules in Appendix 1;**
- (b) the changes to other parts of the Constitution, set out in paragraphs 2.3.2 to 2.3.5 of the report agreed by Council on 21 April 2020.**

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 6.14pm.

The full meetings are available for viewing on the Council's website  
<https://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/53298>