

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

HELD REMOTELY

14 JULY 2021 (6PM)

Present:

Councillors: J Aston (Chairman), P Dyke (Vice-Chairman), G W Ballinger, C J Barnett, J F Byng, V Caulfield, S J Chambers, A Coleman, R H Coleman, B S Dawes, N J Desmond, H E 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, S Miah, F M Oborski MBE, T L Onslow, M Rayner, C Rogers, S E N Rook, D R Sheppard, J W R Thomas, A Totty, L Whitehouse and P W M Young.

C.24 Prayers

Prayers were said by Rev Sallie Butcher, Priest-in-Charge, Wyre Forest West (Mamble, Bayton, Rock, Heightington and Far Forest).

C.25 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

C.26 Declarations of Interests by Members

As recorded later in the minutes, Councillor S Miah declared in respect of agenda item 6 question 4, that he has friends that are taxi drivers and he has no financial interest in taxi drivers at all.

C.27 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

C.28 Public Participation

In accordance with the Council's scheme for public participation at meetings of Full Council, the following member of the public addressed the meeting at this point: Liam Carroll (Wyre Forest resident)

I am here this evening to talk about the Wyre Forest District Council's use of casual contracts. Recently I have noticed an increase of 'casual' positions the district council are advertising and I disagree with this deeply. In the last couple of months, Wyre Forest District Council have posted two vacancies with a casual contract and are stated below:

- Receptionist (posted on 9th June and closed on 24th June)
- Casual Education Assistant (posted on 9th June and closed on 6th July)

A casual contract is when an employer is not obliged to offer work to the individual but there is no obligation for the individual to accept any work that is offered. Whilst casual contracts have some benefits for someone who has the position, the disadvantages massively outweigh them. Examples of disadvantages of casual contracts include:

- *A casual employee is not normally guaranteed regular hours of work and means that there is no guarantee of regular income and therefore hard for individuals to budget and manage their finances.*
- *Casual employees may miss out on employee benefits such as annual leave and a pension.*
- *Not knowing when you will be called into work can lead to unnecessary stress and can be restrictive as you may be offered work at a short notice.*
- *Casual contracts can also have a damaging effect on the employee's social life. This is because they may miss social events due to being called into work at such short notice.*
- *Employees on casual contracts are far less likely to receive training from their employer leading to individual's not gaining skills where they would normally have.*

I understand that there is an increase in work needed in different seasons and the right way forward is to hire people on temporary contracts instead of casual ones as they are more beneficial to employees. Overall, I believe that casual contracts should not be used by any employer, especially councils. Wyre Forest should be setting a good example for local employers across the district which they currently are not.

Thank you for listening.

My Questions for Cllr Helen Dyke, Leader of Wyre Forest District Council:

- 1. What percentage of the Wyre Forest District Council's workforce are employed using casual contracts and is this an increase from this time last year?*
- 2. Why does the district council use casual contracts instead of temporary contracts?*
- 3. Do you feel that casual contracts are fair on those employed using them?*
- 4. Will the district council continue to use them?*

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services thanked Mr Carroll for his participation.

In response to his questions she said many employers, large and small, need to build flexibility into their staffing arrangements. They do so in order

to cope with peaks and troughs of work; to allow for unpredictable issues such as staff being ill; or to cover predictable but temporary gaps such as when staff are on holiday. This has been the case probably for decades in the district council.

We have many temporary, fixed term posts and some of these might cover peak periods over the summer e.g. grounds maintenance, museum.

And we have some posts on casual or “zero hours” contracts because the amount and timing of work is not known and cannot be predicted. A good example is that we have a number of facilities assistants who work for us on such contracts – the amount of work to be done can vary at short notice, such as evening room bookings for meetings or events. It is always a matter of choice for the individual whether or not they accept a contract on such terms.

Having casual employments suits the business needs of the council and provides flexibility that also suits individuals. Ultimately, they choose whether or not they wish to work for us and whether or not to accept a casual contract.

All staff, whatever the basis of their employment, are offered the same induction and support, and provided with any training relevant to the role that they will be performing. They all have access to the employee assistance programme. Casual staff can also build entitlement to annual leave.

We currently have 13 casual employees on the HR/Payroll System. This is fewer than one in 25 of the workforce, so the use of such contracts is not widespread. Service areas include: Facilities, Reception, Depot Business Support Unit, Museum and Estates

Casual employment means that there is no obligation on either party - on the Council to make work available or on the casual employee to be available for work when required.

It is not practical for the Council’s fluctuating business requirements to be met solely through temporary contracts. A temporary contract would have to be for a specified number of hours each week and will last for a specified period.

Casual contracts are fair: no one is forced to accept one, and the terms on which they operate are clear to both employee and employer. We will continue to use casual contracts where appropriate as part of our staffing mix.

At 6.18pm Council agreed to suspend Standing Order (section 7, 1.8 (i)) to remove the 30-minute time limit on questions asked by members of the Council to the Cabinet.

C.29

Questions

11 questions had been submitted in accordance with Standing Order (section 7, 1.8) by members of the Council.

1. Question from Councillor Fran Oborski MBE to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

Could the Cabinet Member tell me:

How many staff, including temporary summer staff are currently employed in the Council's Parks/Ground Maintenance Section? How many were employed at July 2020, July 2019 and 2018?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

I can confirm that at all three July dates, July 2018, July 2019 and July 2020 the following staff were employed in community and environment: 15 full time equivalents in parks and open spaces, 3 full time equivalents in landscaping and 2 part time equivalents - 6 months contract employed mainly in parks.

Supplementary question

That is 3 years, what about this year? First of all, are the figures the same for this year, because that was the first sentence in the question.

In that case, could you explain to me why this year such an appalling level of service is being given on grass cutting, whilst in previous years, apparently the same number of staff were doing an excellent job, which was being commended by the public.

Answer

As far as I know, yes.

Yes, thank you for your supplementary Councillor Oborski, perhaps you failed to notice that this year there has been quite a difference in the weather from previous years, certainly from last year. In May this year it was very wet, in June and July it has been both wet and humid, and warm and this has caused prolific growth in both the grass and the weeds. It has taken staff some considerable time to get on top of the situation because of the prolific growth. They are doing so at the moment and hopefully shortly we should be back to the status quo.

2. Question from Councillor Fran Oborski MBE to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services

The Covid Pandemic has led to all Councils having to assist vulnerable homeless people and Rough Sleepers. Could the Cabinet Member tell me: Since the start of the Pandemic how many vulnerable homeless people have been placed in hostel accommodation outside Wyre Forest? How many of those have been placed in Birmingham? What steps are taken to ensure that all hostel accommodation used is operated by companies who

are compliant with RSH (Register of Social Housing) Standards?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services

This council has not placed anybody during the pandemic into hostels in Birmingham. During the pandemic we have primarily placed people under our discretionary duties in commissioned accommodation in Wyre Forest, Wychavon and Worcester City. This accommodation consisted of our commissioned bed and breakfast in the Wyre Forest and Wychavon, a care home and a hotel commissioned by Worcester City and our New Street accommodation in Stourport. The commissioned bed and breakfast and hotels were inspected by Wyre Forest or Worcester City teams and are usually covered either by the Housing Act 2004 regulation or the Fire Safety order of 2005. We do offer housing options to households where we are unable to accommodate in Wyre Forest, that includes advice for non-priority households on registered providers' supported accommodation throughout the county and the West Midlands and they can apply for rehousing. These providers do fall under the jurisdiction of the social housing regulator. There have been homeless people that have gone to Birmingham. However it isn't Wyre Forest that have placed them there, it is that our duty of care has either lapsed or they have lost their entry in the accommodation so we have signposted them on and completed referrals to other organisations that are providers of registered social housing.

Supplementary question

This is very interesting because there is at least one member of this council who has a relative who was sent to a hostel in Birmingham and, as Treasurer of Help, I am aware of at least 2 vulnerable rough sleepers who were placed in hostels in Birmingham and in fact came back to Wyre Forest because of the abuse and drug and other unpleasant behaviour that they were exposed to in Birmingham, so I am sorry but I don't believe that that answer is accurate. What really worries me is those of you that read the Observer will know that on Sunday June the 27th, they actually had a huge article about unsuitable hostels in Birmingham owned or managed by Concept housing, Assist housing, Knight housing spelt with a K, Sustain Limited and Reliant Social Housing. I really want an undertaking from this council that they will not use or post any rough sleeper or vulnerable homeless person from Wyre Forest towards any accommodation organised by those companies as they are in breach of the registered social housing standards. Can I have such an assurance?

Answer

I am afraid that I cannot give you that Councillor Oborski, I would need to explore that further. What I can say is, those that have ended up in Birmingham, and I repeat they were not placed by the Wyre Forest District Council. They may have lost their interim accommodation as you know Councillor Oborski, being very supportive of health and being on their board, that there are many barriers and complex needs of this client group.

It is not a quick solution. I wholeheartedly agree with the article you are referring to and that article is not new, that the unscrupulous dealings of some housing providers in Birmingham are horrendous, they really are, and I am sorry that I can't give that guarantee. I can put something in writing once I have explored that, but I can tell you Wyre Forest has not placed anybody in Birmingham.

3. Question from Councillor Fran Oborski MBE to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services

Achieving low Carbon Targets requires domestic properties to achieve EPC certificates at levels of A and B for preference with C as the lowest acceptable level.

Can the Cabinet Member tell me what percentage of domestic properties in Wyre Forest are at EPC levels: A or B? C? D or lower?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services

I can tell you that in A we have 1%, B we have 7%, C with have 25%, so C and above we do have 33%. There is 40% in D, 19% in E and 6% in F and 2% in G.

Supplementary question

Thank you very much for that information. Now Wyre Forest Community Housing have assured me that in the next 3 to 4 years, their intention is to raise all their properties to at least level C, but as we all know private sector landlords house some of the poorest people in the district and very often their properties are the worst insulated, so you have the poorest people facing the highest bills for heating. What steps can the Council take to vigorously encourage private sector landlords to raise the quality of insulation in their properties, so that none of our poorest residents are faced with these cold, expensive to heat homes?

Answer

We have just received some external funding for an EPC project officer, so we are very much on board with this, and that officer at the moment is dealing with landlords of the private sector to improve those properties in band F or G. This has already led to improvements of 103 properties, so that will bring them above the minimum of E standard, and the team are also submitting further bid funding in partnership with Redditch and Bromsgrove to continue with this work. So, it is something that we are on board with, Councillor Oborski.

4. Question from Councillor Shazu Miah to the Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio

The Covid pandemic has caused severe losses for many local businesses especially the Self Employed. Could the Cabinet Member tell me how

many Wyre Forest Taxi Drivers received Covid payments from the Council and how many did not?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio

Very few of the Government-funded schemes of support for businesses were aimed at self-employed people. If any taxi drivers were employees of companies, the companies could of course use the furlough scheme that was implemented. But the Government did not provide councils with funding to assist self-employed people. For example, the discretionary grant scheme administered by the revenues team closed in August / September 2020. No payments were made to taxi drivers, nor were any applications received. Self-employed taxi drivers would not have been eligible under our criteria which were aimed at businesses with fixed property costs in line with guidance from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

However, Taxi Drivers were eligible for our Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) scheme administered by NWEDR team for which we were able to set our own policy and we promoted this via their local trade group. 7 taxi drivers have received ARG grants. They received £4,097 to cover the period 5/1/21 – 31/3/21 and then a Recovery Grant of £2,000 so £6,097 each in total. We had a couple of applications that unfortunately failed to provide the necessary evidence required to support their application, so these were declined.

As of 30 June 2021, from approximately 731 applications for the Test & Trace Support Scheme payment were submitted, we had 13 applications from taxi drivers and paid 11 of them. The remaining two did not meet the criteria due to excessive levels of capital.

It is not possible without excessive cost to research how many taxi drivers may have applied for assistance from the council tax reduction scheme.

Supplementary question

When I have looked at other Council's around this area, Birmingham, Sandwell and Wolverhampton, I type in Covid grants for taxi drivers and it is plastered all over the internet that the taxi drivers can have grants available. What did our Council do to highlight to taxi drivers that they could be eligible for some grants? It is a shame that this council did not do more, because I was being asked by a variety of taxi drivers at the height of the pandemic and as recently as 2 or 3 months ago. Given the disparity with other Councils what will you do now to see whether or not those taxi drivers that did not know they could apply for grants would now be entitled to an award?

Answer

There was an erroneous article published by the Private Hire & Taxi Monthly saying that WFDC were paying taxi drivers £250 each but we corrected that and advised everyone what the application process was via

Worcestershire Regulatory Services. The team have only recorded 2 applications, and these were declined, several did struggle to provide the necessary evidence. Also, the ARG system did vary across Worcestershire so Covid payments would depend on where taxi drivers were based. We did not try to work across the districts, because we work across Worcestershire wide and it was Worcestershire where we were looking at our fellow District Councils and we tried to provide consistency throughout districts in Worcestershire, but this was not possible.

I will take this back and give you a further written answer if you require.

Councillor S Miah made his declaration at this point (6.36pm).

5. Question from Councillor Ian Hardiman to the Leader of the Council

Would the Leader of the Council update Council on the current progress in respect of the Local Plan, following the Examination in Public earlier in the year?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

This is very much still in the hands of the planning inspector. The planning policy team and planning inspector are still working through all the main modifications required to the plan following the public hearing early in the year. It is expected it will conclude at end of July or beginning of August and then the changes will have a sustainability appraisal undertaken by a consultant. The main modifications will then be taken through the committee process and go out for public consultation for 6 weeks in September / October it is hoped. The planning inspector will then consider the responses and whether further changes to the document are required. The examination of the local plan will conclude with the Council receiving the inspector's report, which we anticipate being at the end of the calendar year or the beginning of the New Year. I do hesitate slightly when I say that, because throughout the process we have not always achieved the dates for one reason or another we would like. Officers do still anticipate adoption of the local plan early 2022.

Supplementary question

Thank you madam leader, that is very helpful. I have really got just one other question really. Can you please agree that the residents of Wyre Forest should also be regularly informed of where we are with the local plan from there onwards?

Answer

Yes, once the work has finished with the planning inspector and our planning policy team, yes I do agree with you that the residents need to know what the process is from there. As I say, dates have slipped at times for whatever reason and I am sure that residents think that it has either been and gone and been done, or disappeared in the ether of time. Yes, I

agree that once we know what the final information is with the planning inspector there will be a process of communication.

6. Question from Councillor Marcus Hart to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio

Would the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital portfolio provide an update on income from our investments purchased through the Capital Portfolio Fund?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio

We achieved just over 90% of projected income for 2020-21 or in numbers it is £1.1m, which is an excellent performance given the impact of the COVID pandemic. This provided a break-even position on the fund - in other words the rental income matched the borrowing costs and the costs of the property ownership. Our property management agents continued to work to secure the maximum income from our tenants and letting by any voids.

Supplementary question

You use the words excellent performance and, on that point, I agree with you. Therefore, do you now regret your and indeed many members of the progressive alliance's vehement opposition to the then Conservative Administration's desire to purchase such acquisitions in and out of this district, which are clearly bringing in an excellent income for the benefit of this council and its residents?

Answer

I said it had an excellent performance, the income is break even. I cannot say anything about what my own colleagues say in the Progressive Alliance, what their opinions are, that is not for me to discuss at this point. You have asked me about the Capital Portfolio Fund and I have answered it and, if you would like a written response, I will give you a written response on behalf of the whole of the Progressive Alliance. But at this moment in time I am not prepared to give you my individual opinion which might differ from my colleagues as we are all one alliance but we all have slightly different perspectives.

7. Question from Councillor Tracey Onslow to the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Safety

Would the Cabinet Member for Culture Leisure and Community Safety update Council regarding what cultural and leisure activities are planned for later in the year, when the Covid restrictions cease and indeed what activities are in the programme for next year?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Safety

The temptation is to say none, but I know you will jump up and down and say “gosh, that is dreadful”. None are actually planned by the district council other than the usual range of activities and events of the Bewdley museum which were advertised. It is not a surprise if members recall paragraph 8.24 of the medium-term financial strategy, that I was actively involved with in the last 2 years, which was considered by Cabinet on 17 December 2019 and made clear what was going to happen. This was over 18 months ago; the member may have overlooked that. It was approved by Council in February 2020 and paragraph 8.24 again of that report said as *part of the localism initiative, approval that the transfer of responsibility for the Arts Development Officer and all discretionary events and summer activities will be sought from the town councils by April 2021 at the latest or alternative sponsorship. If this is not achieved the final year of WFDC funding on those non statutory functions will be 2020-21.*

That is the financial year ended at the beginning of April just gone. At the end of the day I understand that some of the town councils are being creative about what they are going to do and some of our staff are supporting them in that, and that is good that they are planning various events, but perhaps Councillor Onslow might best direct her question to the individual town councils.

Supplementary question

It was around that partnership working because we heard previously that WFDC was going to work with partners to ensure that we had some form of activities, so it was really how that work was progressing because I have not seen anything to say that there are any events at all. I am absolutely aware of the discussions and the budget decision that was taken by the Progressive Alliance at the time. Obviously I did not vote for it, but others did, so it was really where we were with those discussions. I know we were going to come back and say what activities would be run.

Answer

We can come back to you as and when events come forward but we are still in the process, Councillor Helen Dyke is still actively involved with the Chief Executive in the localism discussions, and we are still optimistic about the town councils. Some are being creative; others less so, some are not so inclined to co-operate, and we are working with that but we made our position clear and we cannot afford to go on, as you know we inherited a deficit of well over £2m and we were doing well until the pandemic, to do something about that. We cannot just revert to what we were doing then and spending a lot of money on services that are not statutory functions of the district council. Government has not given us any extra cash to do that. So, at the end of the day the town councils are in an excellent position if they wish to increase their precept to get more money to do more activities on their own patch.

8. Question from Councillor Marcus Hart to the Leader of the Council

Would the Leader of the Council advise Council on the projected rental

income for Wyre Forest House from external tenants for the year 2021-2022 and update on the number of tenancy agreements and the percentage footprint of the building occupied?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

A total of five tenancies are in place and a sixth is expected to be signed shortly. Between them the six tenanted areas represent approximately 27% of the building. Anticipated rental income for 2021-22 is £159,870, assuming the sixth tenant completes by the end of the month. In addition to that, as you will be aware, there are ICT support charges for some of the tenants. I think that is very good and it will be obviously better if the sixth tenant comes along so that is our position at the moment.

Supplementary question

Would she agree with me that this is clearly an asset for the residents of this district, it is the jewel in the crown, and that any suggestion to dispose of this valuable capital asset would not be in the interest of the residents of this district?

Answer

I think I would find it difficult to say I see it as the jewel in the crown. I think many residents of Wyre Forest would find it very difficult to describe it as such. If you will remember, we have made no secret about the fact that we are looking at the future of Wyre Forest House. We have not made any decisions on that yet but I think it was in the Cabinet meeting on 22 December 2020, when we actually did mention that we would be looking at its future in a constructive and detailed way.

9. Question from Councillor Chris Rogers to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

Would the Cabinet Member for Operational Services like to comment on whether he thinks the Progressive Alliance are delivering on its corporate priority in respect of place, and in particular litter picking and grass cutting?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

Yes, I am quite happy that the Progressive Alliance is delivering on its corporate priority in respect of place, and in particular litter picking and grass cutting.

Supplementary question

I am getting regular complaints, as I am sure all Councillors are, that the whole district looks a disgrace with spreading dangerous weeds like ragwort to the extent that we are likely to get in the typical area where we could be sued under the dangerous weeds act. I am sure no particular animal owners will thank us for that. Planting of wildflowers is a great and

indeed a wonderful idea but simply allowing grass and weeds to proliferate does nobody any favours and looks terrible. How should we best explain to our residents and the electorate who spend lots of time and money on their gardens when we are just allowing wild grass and weed seeds to blow everywhere, something they will not thank us for?

Answer

As I explained to Councillor Oborski with regard to her question, yes, we are trying to get on top of the grass cutting. Yes, this year has been difficult due to the climatic conditions which we have been experiencing. Ragwort certainly, as you say, is a dangerous weed and we do at the beginning of the season spray quite vigorously around certain parts of the area to get rid of this weed. We are doing all we can to keep on top of it and get the area back to normality.

10. Question from Councillor Lisa Jones to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

Is the Cabinet Member for Operational Services satisfied with the level of civil enforcement in respect of parking across this District, especially in our rural areas and on estates?

Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services

The council's civil enforcement team are well regarded in the area and across the region in general. They have made noteworthy progress in terms of civil enforcement of parking contraventions across the district. In a normal year this team would distribute well over £100,000 of parking fines to people parking illegally on our streets. Their patrols include housing estates, on Franche, Ferndale, Marpool and Spennells together with all the rural villages within the Wyre Forest.

Supplementary question

We really need to see enforcement officers checking parking on double yellow lines in our rural villages and on our housing estates including evenings and weekends. We have a huge number of complaints from residents regarding these issues, also would the Cabinet Member agree with me that we have insufficient officers to deal with these issues and should we not recruit additional officers, and will he commit to increase the expenditure on this much needed service for our residents.

Answer

To the end of June this year our civil enforcement patrols in rural areas have totalled 31. This is on par with the same period last year and increased on the year before. We have to date issued 1,359 on-street parking penalty charge notices. So, I am sure you will agree with me that the team is doing a wonderful job. No, I don't think there is a need for further officers within the enforcement team; they are doing a wonderful job

as they are. Not only are they visible within the area they are applying covert cameras throughout the area as well, so there are more than one means to catch the cat shall we say.

11. Question from Councillor Chris Rogers to the Leader of the Council

Could the Leader of the Council advise this Council when will the public and our wider communities expect to see work commence to regenerate Worcester Street using the £20.5 million awarded by the Conservative Government for the Future High Street Fund?

Answer from the Leader of the Council

Unfortunately, I have to say not quite yet. If it were as simple as just moving the bulldozers in, changing things around and just building something new, life would be simple but unfortunately it is not. I think it is going to be at least 2022-23 before we see something at ground level making a difference. We are hoping that a planning application will be submitted for the former magistrates' court by the end of August this year, followed by planning applications in May / June 2022, next year, for actual physical buildings. As you can imagine there is an awful lot of work to be done before we get to that point. I would just like to assure you that the Government monitor this £20.5m that they awarded us very strictly. This council has to report back on very strict monitoring rules and regulations to make sure we are using that money correctly and that we are doing what is needed to be done.

Supplementary question

With an award of £20.5m, as you correctly say the Government need regular updates on what we are doing with the money and how progress is being made. Does the Leader not think that it would be only a courtesy to give the electorate the similar information on a regular basis?

Answer

This Council in the past has been caught promising things that either have not happened or have happened way in the future. The idea with this particular award is that there will be a communications plan alongside it about when we will report back to the residents of Wyre Forest. There could well be virtual tours arranged and, now covid restrictions are being released, there will be presentations, there will be walk around areas where residents will be able to see what is happening. But we do not want residents to feel that they have been promised something that is not going to happen. So it is all in hand and I can assure residents that, as soon as possible, we will be providing as much information as we can and inviting them along on the process with us.

C.30

Chairman's Communications

The Council received a list of functions attended by the Chairman or

Vice-Chairman since the Council's last meeting.

C.31 Leader of the Council Announcements

The Leader of the Council referred members to her tabled report.

C.32 Motions Submitted under Standing Orders

Five motions had been received in accordance with Standing Orders (section 7, 4.1)

1. Notice of Motion on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group

Councillor S Miah presented a motion on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group. The motion was seconded by Councillor F Oborski MBE.

Councillor Miah outlined the reasons for the motion and a robust debate ensued.

A number of members spoke in agreement with the motion but felt they were unable to support it as it was originally presented. As a result of the discussions, Councillor Miah proposed an amendment to the motion, which was seconded by Councillor Oborski, to enable support for the motion.

A named vote on the motion, as amended, was recorded as follows and was agreed:

For (31)

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

Against (2)

Councillors: J Aston and R Coleman.

Decision: The notice of motion, as amended, be agreed:

Council commends individuals, local organisations and councillors in the District who have actively contributed to and raised funds to install defibrillators in various public places.

Council notes that:

- **A recent research by West Midlands Ambulance Services showed that around 50% of sudden cardiac arrests are witnessed by bystanders or family members;**

- **There is a 68% chance of survival from a sudden cardiac arrest if a public access defibrillator is used;**
- **Quick intervention could make the difference between life and death;**
- **270 Children a year in the UK die as a result of sudden cardiac arrests;**
- **Only a third of the population are comfortable giving CPR on a stranger;**
- **45.5% of the population in Wyre Forest are over 50 years old and therefore at an increased risk of a sudden cardiac arrest;**

Council resolves to:

- **Request and encourage every new housing development to have a defibrillator within the vicinity of the development and to request at least one defibrillator per 1000 homes.**
- **Encourage all multi occupation homes or flats to have a defibrillator**
- **Encourage West Midlands Ambulance Service to deliver CPR training across the district.**

At 8.10pm the meeting was adjourned for a short comfort break, the meeting resumed at 8.20pm.

2. Notice of Motion, on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group

Councillor S Miah presented a motion on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group. The motion was seconded by Councillor A Totty.

Councillor Miah outlined the reasons for the motion and a full discussion ensued.

Councillor Miah proposed an amendment to the motion to take into account points raised during the debate. The amendments were seconded by Councillor Totty.

Upon a show of hands, the motion as amended was agreed.

Decision: The notice of motion, as amended, on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group be agreed:

Council commends the young people in this District who selflessly provide care for others.

Council notes that:

- **Recent research shows that one in five secondary school children may be a young carer. For many, their caring journey**

begins at a much younger age.

- **Caring for someone can be very isolating, worrying and stressful. For young carers, this can negatively impact on their experiences and outcomes in education, having a lasting effect on their life chances.**
- **Child carers provide vital support for their loved ones, whether this is for physical or mental health problems. However, their own mental health is often overlooked.**
- **Each year, The Carers Trust has organised a Young Carers' Action Awareness Day. In 2021 this was renamed Young Carers' Action Day and was marked on March 16.**
- **The purpose of the day is to raise public awareness of the challenges faced by young people and young adults because of their caring role, and to campaign for greater support for young carers to meet their needs.**

Council resolves to:

- **Promote Young Carers Action Day as widely as possible on an annual basis, particularly to young carers and their families.**
- **Work with the Carers' Trust, KDYT, Worcestershire Young Carers (YSS), Worcestershire County Council and any other relevant organisation to establish an annual event in Wyre Forest to mark this date to which young carers and their families can be invited in person or online, and at which appropriate information and services can be accessed.**
- **Set up a panel of councillors to facilitate the action day.**

3. Notice of Motion from the Conservative Group

Councillor M Hart presented a motion on behalf of the Conservative Group. The motion was seconded by Councillor N Desmond.

Councillor Hart outlined the reasons for the motion and a full and robust debate ensued.

Upon a vote, the motion was agreed by a majority.

Decision: The notice of motion from the Conservative Group, be agreed:

This Council is concerned at the state of the grass verges on many of our estate roads.

This Council welcomes the funding that Worcestershire County Council provides to WFDC to undertake the grass cutting on their behalf on WCC land, in particular, the year on year increases

received over the last 5 years.

Whilst acknowledging there are benefits to allowing insects, wild flowers and wildlife to thrive in long grass, this should not be done at the expense of safety or keeping our area clean and looking good.

This Council resolves to request that the Cabinet Member for Operational Services to ensure that this noticeable reduction in service is restored as a matter of urgency and formally urgently report to Council as to what he has done to tackle this important issue.

At 21.59pm Council agreed unanimously to suspend the Council Procedure Rules (Standing Orders) 1.1 (iii) to allow the meeting to continue until 11.30pm.

On behalf of the Conservative Group, Councillor M Hart withdrew notice of motion no. 4 from the agenda.

5. Notice from Motion from Councillor Vicky Caulfield

Councillor V Caulfield presented her motion which was seconded by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services.

Councillor Caulfield outlined the reasons for the motion. A discussion ensued and upon a show of hands, the motion was agreed by a majority.

Decision: The notice of motion from Councillor V Caulfield be agreed:

Council notes that:

- I. Many local authorities are playing an important role in the UK taking action to achieve net zero carbon emissions, and to protect and revitalise local wildlife and natural habitats.**
- II. Parliament in May 2019 declared an Environment and Climate Emergency, and this Council has already declared a Climate Emergency.**
- III. There is a Bill before Parliament—the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill (published as the “Climate and Ecology Bill”), which, if it became law, would require the government to develop a strategy to address the emergency that would ensure:
 - A. the ecological emergency is tackled shoulder to shoulder with the climate crisis in a joined-up approach;**
 - B. the Paris Agreement is enshrined into law to ensure that UK does its real fair share to limit global temperature rise to the most stringent end of the Paris agreement -1.5°C.****

- C. the Leaders Pledge for Nature is enshrined into law to ensure that the UK's ecosystems are protected and restored with a focus on biodiversity, soils and natural carbon sinks;**
- D. the UK takes full responsibility for our entire greenhouse gas footprint (i.e. consumption emissions plus shipping, flights and land-based transport) by accounting for all of the emissions that take place overseas to manufacture, transport and dispose of the goods and services we import and consume;**
- E. the UK takes full responsibility for our ecological footprint so that we protect health and resilience of ecosystems along both domestic and our global supply chains;**
- F. an independent, temporary Climate and Nature Assembly is set-up, representative of the UK's population, to engage with the UK Parliament and UK Government to help develop the emergency strategy.**

Council therefore resolves to:

- I. Support the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill;**
- II. Inform the local media of this decision;**
- III. Write an open letter to The Member of Parliament for Wyre Forest (shared with our residents through local and social media) urging them to sign up to support the Bill, or thanking them for doing so; and**
- IV. Write to the CEE Bill Alliance, the organisers of the campaign for the Bill, expressing its support (joinus@ceebill.uk).**

C.33 Urgent Motions submitted under Standing Orders

There were no urgent motions.

C.34 2023 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies

Council considered a report from the Chief Executive which sought to agree the Council's response to the Boundary Commission for England's initial proposals on the boundaries of Parliamentary constituencies.

The Leader of the Council presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval.

A discussion ensued and there was full support from across the political groups for the retention of the constituency name of "Wyre Forest".

Councillor Hart thanked the Chief Executive for a very comprehensive and informative report.

Upon a show of hands, the vote was unanimously carried.

Decision: Council

- 1.1 SUPPORT the proposed retention of a constituency coterminous with the district;**
- 1.2 OPPOSE the proposal to rename the constituency as “Kidderminster” and call instead for retention of the name of “Wyre Forest”.**

C.35 Review of the May 2021 elections

Council considered a report from the Electoral Registration Officer and the Returning Officer on the Police and Crime Commissioner, Worcestershire County Council, Kidderminster Town Council elections and Bewdley Town Council, Bewdley West by-election, held on 6 May 2021.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services presented the report and formally moved the recommendation for approval. Councillor M Hart seconded the proposal.

Upon a show of hands, the vote was unanimously carried.

Decision: Council NOTED the report on the May 2021 elections.

C.36 Policy and Budget Framework – Matters which require a decision by Council

a. Recommendations from Cabinet (Strong Leader Decision) – 7 June 2021

- Acquisition of Properties in Kidderminster**

The Leader of the Council presented the recommendations and formally moved them for approval. The Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Safety seconded the proposal.

Upon a show of hands, the vote was unanimously carried.

Decision: Council APPROVED that provision of the amount shown in the confidential report, is made in the Capital Programme to facilitate the acquisition of the specified properties.

b. Recommendations from Cabinet – 6 July 2021

- Unity Park (Former Frenco Site) – Erection of Industrial Units – Amendment to Capital Programme**

The Cabinet Member for Operational Services presented the recommendations and formally moved them for approval. The Leader of Council seconded the proposals.

Councillor Oborski requested a full and frank debate on the item and proposed the exclusion of the press and public.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Miah.

C.37 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Decision: Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business, on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of “exempt Information” as defined in paragraphs 8 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

C.38 Agenda item 13 (b) Recommendations from Cabinet – 6 July 2021

- **Unity Park (Former Frencos Site) – Erection of Industrial Units – Amendment to Capital Programme**

Members discussed the item at length and had the opportunity to engage in a question and answer session with members of the Corporate Leadership Team.

Councillor Miah moved an amendment to the proposal to commission a review of the project by the Internal Audit Manager, for the report to be provided to the Audit Committee and Council within 3 months. He also suggested a full tender / procurement exercise be undertaken for the remainder of the outstanding works. Councillor Oborski MBE seconded the proposals.

Upon a show of hands, the vote on the amendment to the motion was carried.

A vote on the substantive motion was carried and agreed.

Decision: Council APPROVED;

- 1.1 That a review of the project is to be undertaken by the internal audit manager and a report to be provided to the Audit Committee and Council, within 3 months.**
- 1.2 That a full tender / procurement process be put in place in relation to the outstanding works, within three months.**
- 1.3 That any recommendations are to be brought to a special full council meeting to consider those recommendations.**

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 11.23pm.

The full meeting apart from item C.38 is available for viewing on the Council's website

<https://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/your-council/councillors-committees-and>

[-meetings/council-meetings/](#)