

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY,  
KIDDERMINSTER

22 FEBRUARY 2023 (6PM)

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**Present:**

Councillors: P Dyke (Chairman), C Edginton-White (Vice-Chairman), J Aston, G W Ballinger, C J Barnett, B Brookes, V Caulfield, S J Chambers, A Coleman, R H Coleman, B S Dawes, N J Desmond, H E Dyke, N Gale, I Hardiman, P Harrison, M J Hart, K Henderson, L J Jones, N Martin, S Miah, F M Oborski MBE, T L Onslow, M Rayner, C Rogers, S E N Rook, D Ross, D R Sheppard, J W R Thomas, A Totty, L Whitehouse and P W M Young.

**C.62 Prayers**

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

**C.63 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor: J F Byng.

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

As recorded later in the minutes, Councillor S Chambers declared in respect of agenda item nine, Council Tax Setting 2023-2024, that her brother is the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia.

**C.65 Minutes**

**Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

**C.66 Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

**C.67 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 announced that unfortunately, due to lack of support, his charity Valentine Dance event had been cancelled.

**C.68 Leader of the Council Announcements**

The Leader of the Council referred members to her tabled report. A copy of the announcements is available for viewing on the Council's website.

[https://forms.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/council/docs/doc58379\\_20230222\\_council\\_report.pdf](https://forms.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/council/docs/doc58379_20230222_council_report.pdf)

**C.69 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-2026 & Capital Strategy 2023-2033**

A report was considered from the Head of Resources which sought approval of the Council's budget for 2023-2026 having considered the proposed decision and budget reports recommended to council by cabinet.

The report also sought approval of the Capital Strategy for 2023-2033 including prudential indicators which set limits for non-financial investments and to fulfil the key requirements of the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Investment Guidance.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval. She said that the budget proposals had been shaped by the views of residents who had completed the council's annual budget consultation and consideration of the alternative budgets shared by the Liberal Democrat and Conservative groups.

She said that the cabinet were grateful to the public for sharing their views and to the other groups for their suggestions. She added that the strategy continued with the programme of work to consider options for how the council might deliver services differently in future to save costs and protect front line services.

The Cabinet Member gave a summary of the nine proposals as outlined in the report considered by cabinet on 7 February 2023. In addition to the proposals, she advised that cabinet were sympathetic to two further alternative budget proposals that do not have revenue implications for 2023-24, namely; the webcasting for cabinet meetings would be resumed in the new municipal year, and cabinet will invite the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to undertake a review of inclusive play equipment in the parks owned by WFDC in the new municipal year.

In conclusion, the Cabinet Member said that the proposals set out in the report represented a realistic way forward that reflected the aspirations of the cabinet; acknowledged the alternative proposals put forward by the opposition groups whilst still allowing the authority to continue to balance the books in these challenging times.

The Leader seconded the proposals.

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On behalf of the Conservative Group Councillor N Desmond moved a suite of amendments as set out in appendix 5 of the report. He said that the alternative proposals sought to be helpful and constructive. He said they were formulated by the needs of the residents and their priorities and were a continuation of the group's vision and aims that had been clearly set out over the last two years. He added that the proposals were based on restoring pride within the district.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor M Hart.

A robust debate on the amendment ensued.

**Named votes on the Conservative Group proposals were recorded as follows and the amendment was defeated:**

For (13)

Councillors: B Brookes, S J Chambers, B S Dawes, N J Desmond, N Gale, I Hardiman, P Harrison, M J Hart, K Henderson, L J Jones, T L Onslow, C Rogers and D Ross.

Against (19)

Councillors: J Aston, G W Ballinger, C J Barnett, V Caulfield, A Coleman, R H Coleman, H E Dyke, P Dyke, C Edginton-White, N Martin, S Miah, F M Oborski MBE, M Rayner, S E N Rook, D R Sheppard, J W R Thomas, A Totty, L Whitehouse and P W M Young.

Abstained (0)

A discussion on the substantive budget proposals took place. The Leader of the Liberal Democrat group, Councillor F Oborski MBE thanked the Cabinet Member for taking on the proposals from her group and welcomed the inclusion of the £5k community fund to deliver events to celebrate the coronation of King Charles III.

The Leader of the Conservative group, Councillor M Hart, said that it was regrettable that no funds had been allocated for the provision of disabled play equipment in Brinton Park and Stourport riverside. However it was a positive step that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been invited to undertake a review on the matter.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio addressed a number of the issues raised during the debate and urged council to support the proposals.

**A named vote on the substantive budget proposals was recorded as follows and was agreed:**

For (19)

Councillors: J Aston, G W Ballinger, C J Barnett, V Caulfield, A Coleman, R H Coleman, H E Dyke, P Dyke, C Edginton-White, N Martin, S Miah, F M Oborski MBE, M Rayner, S E N Rook, D R Sheppard, J W R Thomas, A Totty, L Whitehouse and P W M Young.

Against (0)

Abstained (13)

Councillors: B Brookes, S J Chambers, B S Dawes, N J Desmond, N Gale, I Hardiman, P Harrison, M J Hart, K Henderson, L J Jones, T L Onslow, C Rogers and D Ross.

**Decision: Council;**

**1.1 THREE YEAR BUDGET, CAPITAL STRATEGY AND POLICY FRAMEWORK 2023-2026**

**1.1.1 APPROVED the updated Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023-2026.**

**1.1.2 APPROVED the Cabinet Proposals – taking into account the impact on the Council’s Capital and Revenue Budgets for 2023-2026 as shown in the tables in paragraphs 6.1 and 6.3 and as set out below:**

- a) Approval to provide community leadership funding of £1,000 for each councillor in 2023-24, at a cost of £33,000 in 2023-24.**
- b) Approval to provide additional staffing resources to address capacity issues at a cost of £119,000 in 2023-24, £166,000 in 2024-25 and £189,000 in 2025-26.**
- c) Approve investment for a further 5 year period in the ICT strategy which has revenue implications of £6,000 in 2023-24, £49,000 in 2024-25 and £123,000 in 2025-26. The ICT Strategy will deliver £1.6m capital investment over the period 2023-24 to 2028-29.**
- d) Approval to fund 2 generic Civil and Environmental enforcement posts £65,140 in 2023-24 and £67,740 in 2024-25.**
- e) Approval to provide additional litter picking resource in Stourport and Bewdley, a £10,000 pa core element to cover six weeks in the summer and a £10,000 pa match funding element subject to match funding from the Town Councils.**
- f) Approval to provide a £5,000 Community Fund to provide grants of £100 - £500 to support community, charity and**

residents' groups to deliver events to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III.

- g) Approval to provide new culture/arts events grants to town councils £20,000 pa.
  - h) Approval of up to £1,000 pa for the costs of the No Barriers Awards scheme on the basis that there is an absolute minimum of administrative support provided by WFDC;
  - i) Approval of the inclusion of the Housing Fund grant offer in the Capital Programme. The grant offer of £706,000 will support capital expenditure in 2023-24 of £876,000. The balance to be met from the Evergreen Investment Fund.
- 1.1.3 APPROVED the fees and charges in line with this Strategy, and the impact on the Council's Revenue Budget for 2023-2026, as shown in Appendix 3.
- 1.1.4 APPROVED the Council's updated Capital Strategy:
- a) Approval of the Capital Strategy 2023-2033 set out in Appendix 1 of the December Cabinet report and the associated Quatitative Indicators set out in Appendix 2 of the same report.
  - b) Approval of variations to the Capital Programme and Vehicle, Equipment and Systems Renewals Schedule as set out in Appendices 2A and 2B, of the report (which updates Appendix 1 of the Capital Strategy report to December 2022 Cabinet).
  - c) Approval of the limits for gross debt for non-treasury investments compared to net service expenditure and for commercial income as a percentage of net service expenditure as set out in Appendix 2C of the report.
- 1.1.5 APPROVED that any Final Accounts savings arising from 2022-2023, together with surplus Earmarked Reserves, be allocated by the Head of Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio.
- 1.1.6 The General Fund Revenue Budget be APPROVED including all updates from the position in December 2022 as set out in the report.
- 1.2 COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATES
- 1.2.2 Council:

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- a) **SETS the Council Tax for Wyre Forest District Council on a Band D Property at £236.21 for 2023-2024 (£229.34 2022-2023) which represents an increase of 3% on Council Tax from 2022-2023.**
- b) **ENDORSES the provisional Council Tax on a Band D Property in 2024-2025 of £243.27 and £250.57 in 2025-2026, being increases of 3%.**

**1.2.3 NOTED the Head of Resources (as Chief Financial Officer) opinion on the budget proposals, recommended by the Cabinet in the report, as detailed in Appendix 4 of the report.**

**C.70 Council Tax Setting 2023-2024**

Council considered the formal resolution for setting the Council Tax for 2023-24.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Portfolio formally moved the recommendations as set out in the report for approval. She said the resolution included setting a Council Tax for this Council of £236.21, an increase of just under 3% which for a Band D property was just £6.87 for the year or 13p per week. She added that most properties in Wyre Forest were in Bands A to C and would therefore pay less than this.

The Leader seconded the proposal.

A discussion ensued. Councillor S Chambers made her declaration at this point (7.33pm).

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

For (32)

Councillors: J Aston, G Ballinger, C Barnett, B Brookes, V Caulfield, S Chambers, A Coleman, R Coleman, B Dawes, N Desmond, H Dyke, P Dyke, C Edginton-White, N Gale, I Hardiman, P Harrison, M Hart, K Henderson, L Jones, N Martin, S Miah, F Oborski MBE, T Onslow, M Rayner, C Rogers, S Rook, D Ross, D Sheppard, J Thomas, A Totty, L Whitehouse and P Young.

**Decision: Council APPROVED the formal Council Tax Resolution 2023-24 at Appendix 1, taking into account information contained in Appendices 2 to 5.**

**C.71 Policy and Budget Framework – Matters which require a decision by Council**

- a. **Recommendation from the Treasury Management Review Panel –**

30-01-2023

- **Treasury Management Strategy 2023-24**

Councillor S Miah presented the recommendations and formally moved them for approval. He thanked the Head of Resources, her team and the external advisors for their hard work and expert advice they give to members.

Councillor F Oborski MBE seconded the proposals.

Upon a vote, the proposals were agreed.

**Decision: Council;**

- 1.1 Approved the restated Prudential Indicators and Limits for the financial years 2023-24 to 2032-33, along with the new Liability Benchmark, included in Appendix 3 of the report. (There have been no revisions to the Prudential Indicators considered by the Panel)**
- 1.2 Approved the updated Treasury Management and Investment Policy and Strategy Statements for the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 (the associated Prudential Indicators are included in Appendix 3 and the detailed criteria is included in Section 10 and Appendix 5).**
- 1.3 Approved the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement that sets out the Council's policy on MRP included in Appendix 1.**
- 1.4 Approved the Authorised Limit Prudential Indicator included in Appendix 3.**
- 1.5 Noted that the separate Capital Strategy 2023-33, to be approved separately by Council, sets out the policy statement covering non-treasury investments including the related suite of prudential indicators.**

**C.72**

**Questions**

Eight questions had been submitted by members of the council in accordance with standing orders.

**1. Question from Councillor N Desmond to the Leader of the Council**

Last June, the cabinet took the decision to end their agreement with Cordwell leisure to provide a cinema and leisure facilities on the former Glades Site, Kidderminster. Could the Leader explain what has happened over the last 8 months to redevelop this important site?

**Answer from Leader of the Council**

I am sorry to say a common theme will arise in some of tonight's answers, and it will be about Government delays. Cabinet decided in the summer to progress a preferred development scheme for parcel 1 of Lionfields, which is the former Glades site. If you remember we parcelled them into various numbers, with the site being taken to market for development, subject to the outcome of a feasibility study. The tendering of the feasibility study had been held up because we applied for the money for this from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The plan was submitted at the end of July. The Government's announcement was scheduled for October 2022, but we did not get the answer until December. So, until we got that answer, we were not sure if we would be lucky with that grant, and the actual first tranche of the money only went into our bank account on the 31 January 2023. So now we know we have got that money and we are successful with the grant, the plan is for us to do the invitation to tender this month, or the beginning of next month. I can only apologise we could not move quicker, but we were waiting for Government to get back to us.

**Supplementary question**

I am very grateful for that full and frank answer, it is helpful. Can the Leader just clarify how much money have we had in, or how much is the feasibility study looking to cost? And more importantly an invitation to tender to do what? Is that a complete feasibility study for the whole package, and does she agree with me that the most probable outcome is likely to be a residential development?

**Answer**

I agree with you on that Councillor Desmond, but obviously I cannot foretell the future and if you remember we had this conversation at Cabinet about what was likely to come forward. I have not got the complete cost in front of me regarding the application, but I will supply that to you as soon as possible. Yes, I think it is likely to be residential, and the tender part is for us to do the feasibility and get started.

**2. Question from Councillor M Hart to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services**

With The Environment Act 2021 becoming law introducing the need for a separate food waste collection, could the Cabinet member reassure me that there are no plans whatsoever to introduce 3 weekly collections?

**Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services**

All the Worcestershire councils, as you well know, are planning for the introduction of food waste collections, but have been badly let down by Government. We are still waiting for Government to confirm the timetable for the implementation and say what funding will be available to cover the costs of this implementation. Because of this, any decisions on how food waste will be implemented, and other changes required under The Environment Act, will be a decision for the future Cabinet and not this administration to take.



**Supplementary question**

Would the Cabinet member confirm this, and indeed say that if they were to be the future administration or that he or any of his colleagues were involved in, would he rule out 3 weekly collections, yes or no?

**Answer**

Unfortunately, I cannot do that, there are several options on the table that have been put forward by the consultants which the waste group within the county is looking at. As you say 3 weekly collections is one of those options. Whatever Cabinet / administration is in post after the May elections, it is for them to look at the proposals and make a decision on them. It is not within the scope of this administration.

**3. Question from Councillor B Brookes to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Wellbeing and Democratic Services**

Could the Cabinet Member please tell this Council how many members of staff have left this Council since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2022, by whatever means, how many job vacancies we currently have unfilled and what are the posts?

**Answer from the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Wellbeing and Democratic Services**

I can tell you 60 members of staff have left this organisation, and they are varying from resignations, ill health, retirement, and end of contracts. I can also tell you that we have a number of vacancies ranging from operatives, customer services, procurement, auditors, Development Manager, Resilience Manager and Health & Safety Officer.

**Supplementary question**

What evidence do you have that the 5% uplift to staff wages has made in stemming the flow of staff, following the 4 years of mismanagement by this administration?

**Answer**

I cannot possibly agree that it is mismanagement of the last 4 years. I think the 5% did not go far enough. I think that staff will come and go for varying reasons. I also think that what the 5% has done, is that it has increased the people that apply for our jobs and the skill set of the people that are applying for the jobs has increased. I do not think it is mismanagement of the last 4 years.

**4. Question from Councillor T Onslow to the Cabinet Member Culture, Leisure and Community Safety**

Immediately after the Cabinet Member replied to my question at the last meeting, a local resident contacted me to say that what I had just been told was completely incorrect – exactly what happened when the Leader replied to my question on this in February. In light of this, would the Cabinet Member agree with me, in respect of the HLF Bid for Brinton Park,

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that the Administration has lost control of the whole process and negotiations with the Scout Group – who were told on 23<sup>rd</sup> December, the last working day before Christmas, by email that they were being cut out of the HLF project – have been appallingly handled?

### **Answer from Cabinet Member Culture, Leisure and Community**

#### **Safety**

No, I do not agree.

#### **Supplementary question**

Would he please tell me, this project has been going on and this money was granted two and half years ago, when is work going to start in Brinton Park?

#### **Answer**

Many councils across the country are having to reshape and rescale their budgets for different projects. And you know because construction costs have gone up dramatically over the last couple of years. The National Lottery Heritage Fund actually contacted officers of this Council, on the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup> December and made it very clear that the project funding was at risk of being withdrawn and imposed a deadline of the 31<sup>st</sup> December on this council, to submit the signed lease and licence to agree to submit a re-scoped project omitting the pavilion. And that was agreed with the Lottery Fund. The scouts confirmed on the 21<sup>st</sup> December that the documentation was not going to be agreed before Christmas and regrettably we had to inform the scouts that the pavilion element of the project would be omitted. The total approved grant is £2.4 million, of which £175,000 relates to the pavilion. Given the increases in construction costs the Council is not going to increase its financial commitment and there is no realistic hope of alternative funding. Cost reductions of about £200,000 have to be made. While the pavilion and WF21 the scout group were important to the overall bid, it was only a small proportion of the total cost. It is about new toilets, new café and y a lot for the whole of the public of Wyre Forest and that's what Brinton Park is about. We need to keep within the overall funding of the scheme. We are sad this has had to happen, but given the need to keep within that budget, the willingness of the fund to contemplate a re-scoped project, that omitted the pavilion, could not be overlooked. We would have lost the whole money if we had not re-scoped and put in a new bid, and that is the bottom line. It's gone on for years and years - the discussions with the scouts, everybody, and I think I said this when we did speak in December, at the end of the day our Officers tried their hardest and it is sad it couldn't be achieved. But at the end of the day, we do not want to lose the project for that part, because it is a major project, a major refurbishment and it needs to go ahead.

### **5. Question from Councillor I Hardiman to the Cabinet Member for Operational Services**

Whilst welcoming the news in the 1<sup>st</sup> February edition of Wyred Weekly regarding access to Wyre Forest House would the Cabinet Member advise this Council whose decision it was to reverse this policy, why it was ever introduced in the first place and by whom?

**Answer from the Cabinet Member for Operational Services**

This was an operational decision by officers. Perhaps you have forgotten Councillor Hardiman that the restrictions on access to the building and many other places was first introduced in 2020, as a result of Government's legislation in response to the Covid 19 pandemic.

**Supplementary question**

Would the Cabinet member agree with me that the decision to shut up shop to the public we serve was a disgrace and demonstrates that this Progressive Alliance led Council has forgotten that it is the electorate they serve and not themselves?

**Answer**

Wyre Forest House is not a customer service hub. The service hub for the district is located at Green Street. There is no need for Wyre Forest House to be open to casual visitors to access any services that are here.

**6. Question from Councillor N Desmond to the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Safety**

Following the Cabinet's strong leader report setting out the procurement process for providing WFDC electric vehicle charging points, could the relevant cabinet member confirm if the contract has been awarded and when can we expect the first EVC to be operational by?

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

There are two Conservative members on the all-party Green Panel. They have been kept fully informed on the progress, and at its meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> December, the panel was informed that the specification for tender should be advertised in January and an appointment of a contractor in March. At the last meeting, that was last Friday, the panel was informed that the tender was due to be advertised on the 17<sup>th</sup> of February and contract due to be awarded in April. I can confirm that the tender document was released on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> February. The Green Panel has been disappointed that more progress hasn't been made and at the end of the line we were given explanations throughout by our officers and consultants, that these delays had to be dealt with and it was nothing to do with us not wanting it to proceed.

**Supplementary question**

Would the Cabinet member agree with me that this whole process has been utter shambolic and utter incompetence from the Progressive Alliance? I was told last September that the first one would be delivered last autumn / winter 2022, despite the tender document not even going out at the time. Then all members were told in November that the tender advert would go out at the 23<sup>rd</sup> November and final award the 6<sup>th</sup> January. We are now told that the tender document is just gone out and the contract will be in April. Isn't this a reflection that this Progressive Alliance have simply failed to deliver anything meaningful for the last four years?

**Answer**

No, it is a bit rich really to hear this sort of complaint about the timetable when the Conservative group keeps wanting to delay implementation. In December there was the issue Overview & Scrutiny Committee wanted to refresh the business case and work with further consultants and Cabinet could not agree with that. They have tried again tonight with their amendments for the budget, they do not want to see progress, they do not want to see implementation basically. I acknowledge that regrettably progress has not followed the timetable indicated in the Strong Leader report approved on 14<sup>th</sup> November. And I said that we were very disappointed about that. But delays have occurred due to the complexity of the process and the tender documentation. They need to be right so that we can move forward to awarding a contract in April and see delivery in the summer.

**7. Question from Councillor M Hart to the Leader of the Council**

Would the Leader of the Council who has responsibility for Parish Councils please set out to this Council exactly how many Parish Council meetings (not including Kidderminster Town Council which she sits on in) she has attended since she took over responsibility in May 2021?

**Answer from the Leader of the Council**

I can confirm that I have met with many Parish Councils and Councillors in my role as Localism. I have also attended the forums when they have taken place. I have not attended Parish Council meetings. My upbringing when I was taught manners was: do not attend where you are not invited. Had any Parish Council invited me to attend any meeting, I would have gladly done so, or as many as they invited me to attend.

**Supplementary question**

Would she agree with me, frankly that that answer is absolutely laughable, and it is absolutely shameful and disgraceful that the Leader of this Council and who has responsibility, does not go and attend Parish Councils. And does it not demonstrate to all those Parish Councils and all of us in the rural areas, that this Progressive Alliance just do not care about them?

**Answer**

I do not think it demonstrates that at all, and of course I understand your question being that most of the Parish Councils are within the ward that you represent. So, I can understand why, and I am sure it will appear in a leaflet next week. But I was only too happy to attend. Had I been invited I would have done so; I was not invited, and I did not.

**8. Question from Councillor M Hart to the Leader of the Council**

Could the Leader of the Council tell this Council what she thinks the Progressive Allowance's biggest achievement has been over the last 4 years?

**Answer from the Leader of the Council**

I refer members back to the Leader's announcements and the part that I did not read out is in reference to the question that Councillor Hart has asked. And the wording is, *the period has been dominated*, this is the past four years, *by external factors, including significant periods of upheaval at Westminster, the UK's exit from the European Union, cost of living crisis and of course the thing that will haunt us forever, Covid 19 pandemic*. And not just the Progressive Alliance but this Council - because let us not forget we are a Council of bodies all supposedly working together - have dealt with all those issues very well. We have continued to provide a service to residents of Wyre Forest through all those things that have come across the Council, along with things like investing in a Green Panel to look at the green issues that haven't been addressed before by this Council. So, I think that small paragraph in the Leader's announcements shows what the Progressive Alliance and this Council have achieved during those past four years.

**Supplementary question**

Having told us what she thought the greatest achievement is, would she tell this Council whether her biggest regret is - a) Not redeveloping the Crown House site; b) Not redeveloping the former Glades site; c) Not redeveloping the Bridge Street site in Stourport; d) Releasing far too much land for housing development from the green belt; or e) All of the above?

**Answer**

I think that anything we haven't been able to achieve as a Council is sad, and I think that anything we have been able to achieve as a Council should be celebrated.

**C.73 Motions Submitted under Standing Orders**

No motions were received by the deadline.

**C.74 Emergency Motions submitted under Standing Orders**

There were no emergency motions.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 8.05pm.

The meeting is available for viewing on the Council's website  
<https://wyreforestdc.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcasts>