

FULL COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Full Council held on Thursday 19 January 2023 at 6.00 pm in Telford Theatre, Limes Walk, Oakengates, Telford, TF2 6EP

Present: Councillors S Bentley, K T Blundell, M Boylan, S P Burrell, E M Callear, L D Carter, E J Carter, G H Cook, S Davies, A J Eade, A R H England, N A M England, R C Evans, V A Fletcher, I T W Fletcher, J Gough, C Healy, M B Hosken, T L B Janke, A S Jhawar, J Jones, R T Kiernan, G C W Latham-Reynolds, J E Lavery, A Lawrence, A D McClements, R Mehta, K Middleton, T J Nelson, G L Offland, R A Overton, S J Reynolds, S A W Reynolds, H Rhodes, P J Scott, C F Smith, B J Thompson, W L Tomlinson, K T Tomlinson, C R Turley, P Watling, B Wennington, D R W White and D Wright

Apologies: Councillors A J Burford, N A Dugmore, E J Greenaway, V J Holt, J Loveridge, I Preece, Lord Sahota, J M Seymour and M J Smith

239 Prayers and Reflections

Les Pointer, representing the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, said prayers.

240 Councillor Leon Murray

A minute's silence was held following the passing of Councillor Leon Murray. A number of Members paid tribute to Councillor Murray.

241 Declarations of Interest

None.

242 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the Full Council meeting and the Extraordinary General Meeting held on 10 November 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Mayor.

243 Leader's Report & Announcements

The Leader noted the granting of £20m of Levelling Up Fund that had been received for the Borough, following the hard work of officers and partners. This funding would support the redevelopment of Telford Theatre.

There had been another flooding event in the Borough and the Council had worked closely with partners to install the flood barriers, warn and inform residents and support local businesses.

During the cost of living crisis, the Council had pledged to freeze council tax for the second year running and noted that the Borough had the second lowest general council tax in the country.

He noted that 2023 would be a difficult year, but the Council would not shy away from this challenge.

244 Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor asked Members to note the report on Mayoral Engagements since the last meeting of Full Council.

The Mayor noted his attendance at a number of events prior to Christmas, in particularly a tour of Telford in Santa's Sleigh.

He also noted that he would be hosting a Valentine's Day Ball to raise funds for charitable purposes encouraged all those who wished to attend to purchase tickets.

245 Public Questions

The following questions from the public had been received.

- (i) The following question to Cllr S Davies, Leader, was submitted by Mr John Box:

“Cabinet committed to Local Nature Reserves at Lightmoor, Randlay Valley and Rough Park in February 2018 and The Cockshutt in March 2021. These proposed LNRs are still to be legally designated. What date can be committed to unequivocally and absolutely for the legal designation of each of these four LNRs?”

Cllr S Davies, Leader responded that the process to declare a Local Nature Reserve was not simple and required a significant amount of resource, investigation and periods of consultation. A survey, individual management plans, legal searches and sealing of agreements needed to be undertaken for each individual reserve. It was noted that since the adoption of the Local Plan, 13 LNRs had been formally designated, with a further 4 due to be completed shortly.

- (ii) The following question to Cllr R A Overton, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member: Housing, Enforcement & Transport, was submitted by Mr Thomas Hoof:

“In 2022 Telford sadly lost two lives on the A518 between Donnington & Newport, and since there have been more accidents and many near misses.

What measures are being taken to improve the safety of the A518 between Donnington & Newport?”

Cllr Overton, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member: Housing, Enforcement & Transport, responded that his thoughts were with everyone who had lost their lives. Council Officers had met with the Road Safety team at West Mercia Police and were supporting them with their investigations. Recently a report had been submitted to Cabinet in respect of 20mph zones and the administration's commitment to creating safer walking and cycling routes. It was noted that a £900,000 investment had been completed on the A518 between Donnington and Newport last year by installing a well-used walking and cycle route, in addition to road resurfacing.

246 Councillor Questions On Notice

The following questions were asked under Council Procedure Rule 6.2.2:-

- (a) Councillor P J Scott asked the following question of Councillor R A Overton, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member: Housing, Enforcement & Transport:

“The Royal Victoria Hotel in St Mary's Street Newport has become a long standing eyesore. It is now known locally as The Shame Of Newport. Is there anything that the council can do to get a satisfactory resolution on this long running saga? Is Compulsory Purchase a realistic option?”

Councillor Overton responded that The Royal Victoria Hotel was a Grade 2 Listed Building with consent to provide alternative use. The Development of the building had stalled due to viability, however, the Council was engaging with the developer. The Council would use its powers to protect the building, but noted that compulsory purchase would be a last resort.

Councillor Scott asked a supplementary question:

“What reassurances could be given that it was safe to walk through the passageway and was the scaffolding checked on a regular basis”

Councillor Overton advised he would provide a written response.

- (b) Councillor G Offland asked the following question of Councillor P R Watling, Cabinet Member: Stronger & Safer Communities:

“I am concerned to learn that despite being in the middle of an unprecedented cost-of-living crisis, the funding to support the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme has been significantly reduced this year. What assurances can the Cabinet member please give me that this cut in funding will not lead to an increase in homelessness in the Borough?”

Councillor Watling responded that central government had cut the funding to the scheme despite growing demand. The Council had made the decision to increase funding for this service itself in order to meet this need. Last year, the Council wrote to the Secretary of State in regards to the funding of the scheme, however, no satisfactory response was received.

247 Cabinet Decisions Made Since the Last Meeting of the Council

No questions of clarification were raised.

248 Setting of Council Tax Base 2023/24

The Cabinet Member: Finance, Governance & Customer Services presented the report of the Director: Finance & Human Resources.

As required, a Recorded Vote was taken:

For: (44) Councillors S Bentley, K T Blundell, M Boylan, S P Burrell, E Callear, E J Carter, L D Carter, G H Cook, S Davies, A J Eade, A R H England, N A M England, R C Evans, I T W Fletcher, V A Fletcher, J Gough, C Healy, M B Hosken, T L B Janke, A S Jhawar, J Jones, G Latham-Reynolds, J Lavery, A Lawrence, A D McClements, R Mehta, K Middleton, T J Nelson, G Offland, R A Overton, S A W Reynolds, S J Reynolds, H Rhodes, P J Scott, C F Smith, B J Thompson, W L Tomlinson, C R Turley, P R Watling, B Wennington, D R W White, D Wright.

Against: (0)

Abstain: (0)

RESOLVED – that:

- a) The calculation of the tax base as detailed in paragraph 4.4 and Appendix A of the report be approved;
- b) In accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012:2914), the amount calculated for Telford and Wrekin Council Tax base for 2023/24 for its Special Fund Area shall be as per the appropriate parish amounts as detailed in Appendix A of the report for the parishes listed in paragraph 4.5 of the report.

249 Recommendations from Cabinet - 5 January 2023

- (a) 2022/23 Financial Monitoring Report

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Governance and Customer Services presented the report of the Director: Finance and Human Resources which provided Members with the latest financial monitoring position for the year in relation to the revenue budget, capital programme and income collection.

RESOLVED – that the transfer of £6m to a budget strategy reserve, the changes to the capital programme and the use of balances as detailed in Appendix A of the report be approved.

250 Motions on Notice

(a) Councillor R A Overton moved, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 7, the following Motion:

“Our residents and business continually tell us about the lack of reliable and affordable bus services across Telford and Wrekin. This impacts rural, urban and employment areas of our Borough and our residents access to public service including education, cultural and leisure services.

The privatisation of bus transport by the Conservative government in the 1980s is a failed experiment based upon Conservative ideology rather than social need, which places profit before people. The Government has tried to reignite bus travel through promotion of the 2021 National Bus Strategy but this continues to fail many areas like Telford & Wrekin. Prohibitions placed on the Council by the Government prevents the Council from effectively managing our own bus services.

Operators continue to withdraw services with those that remain often overcrowded, late, or worse, cancelled at peak times; this impacts on residents who rely on such services to attend work, school and vital medical appointments.

As a Council on the side of residents and businesses, we are committed to providing well-connected and affordable bus network. Not only does this contribute to reducing carbon emissions, pollution and congestion, but for many affordable buses are crucial as the ongoing cost-of-living crisis continues.

The Council does all it can despite having £140m of cuts each year since 2010 to support bus travel in the Borough and support efforts to help residents during the national cost of living crisis we have launched new subsidised services to employment, retail, educational and medical locations across our Borough. But with the continued cuts to council services by the Conservative government the ambition of Telford and Wrekin to have a decent bus services is being held back by the government lack of ambition and action.

This Council calls on the Government to give local control, planning and regulation of the local bus network where operators are only able to provide services under contract to the local authority, and to do so without any current preconditions such as having an elected Mayor and that the government see public transport as a key contributor to economic growth.

Council agrees to write to the current Secretary of state for Transport and local Members of Parliament and support our calls to improve local bus services here in Telford and Wrekin.”

Councillor L D Carter seconded the Motion.

Following a robust debate, the Motion was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED - that the motion be approved

(b) Councillor P R Watling proposed the following Motion:-

“This Council calls on the Government to urgently review the way in which it funds the provision of Housing Benefit ensure that Councils are fully reimbursed for this benefit which we administer on their behalf.

It has been acknowledged by the Government that the current system for the funding of additional housing costs associated with supported accommodation is in urgent need of reform. The current system means that councils are not fully subsidised for the Housing Benefit it pays to some of these types of accommodation, where often the rent can be significantly higher than that charged in mainstream accommodation. Numerous Government reviews over more than a decade have concluded that the whole scheme needs urgent overhaul, yet to date there has been no definitive action. Over the last decade we have seen the number of units of supported accommodation rise significantly, and the average housing costs increase exponentially. For 2022/23 we forecast that these schemes will directly cost the council and the local taxpayer over £900,000. This sector of housing is only set to expand further in the future, and the financial impact on councils is untenable in the current economic climate.

Therefore, this council resolves that we:

Call on the Government to reconsider the current aspect of Housing Benefit linked to Supported Housing to ensure that Local Authorities are fully reimbursed for the housing cost payments that they are obliged to make.”

The Motion was seconded by Councillor A D McClements.

Following a robust debate, the Motion was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED - that the Motion be approved

(c) Councillor C Healy proposed the following Motion:-

“Once again the Ironbridge Gorge community is facing the prospect of the River Severn flooding and entering properties. Whilst many other area of our Borough will again be affected by other forms of flooding. Not only does this increased frequency of flooding have a huge emotional and financial impact on residents and businesses, there is also a significant cost to the council. Whilst the Environment Agency own the flood barriers and decide when to deploy them, a condition of having this protection is that this council contributes to the costs of the deployment and leads on support for the unprotected properties in the Gorge. Across Telford and Wrekin it is the council who continues to support at times of flooding by delivering sand bags and clearing away damaged items following flood events. The increased frequency of flooding events is adding a further pressure on already stretched council resources.

Since 2010 this Conservative government has deployed sticking plasters to the issues of flooding in The Gorge and across Telford and Wrekin, without a real plan to help residents, business and the council

This council agrees to write to the Secretary of State for the Environment to call on the government to act as follows –

- provide more funding to deal with the increased frequency of flooding;
- fund improved flood defences for Ironbridge that would be cheaper to put in place and have less impact of residents and businesses;
- urgently implement actions in the upper reaches of the Severn to slow the flow of water and reduce flood peaks:
- provide funding to support areas across Telford and Wrekin who suffer from repeated flooding issues.”

The Motion was seconded by Councillor S Davies.

Following a lengthy debate, the Motion was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED - that the motion be approved

The meeting ended at 7.29 pm

Chairman:

Date: Thursday 2 March 2023