

Minutes of the proceedings of the Council

Monday, 15th July, 2024 at 6.00pm
in the Council Chamber, The Council House, Priory Road, Dudley

Present:

Councillor H Bills (Mayor)
Councillor P Lee (Deputy Mayor)
Councillors A Ahmed, S Ali, K Archer, P Atkins, S Azad, F Barras, C Bayton, D Bevan, I Bevan, P Bradley, K Casey, B Challenor, S Clark, J Clinton, E Cobb, B Collins, M Cook, D Corfield, J Cowell, T Creed, A Davies, K Denning, P Dobb, P Drake, S Edwards, J Foster, A Goddard, S Greenaway, J Griffin, L Hamblett, D Harley, P Harley, S Henley, J Hill, A Hopwood, M Hussain, L Johnson, S Keasey, I Kettle, K Khan, E Lawrence, K Lewis, W Little, C Littler, P Lowe, Q Mughal, S Mughal, S Phipps, R Priest, A Qayyum, K Razzaq, C Reid, S Ridley, D Roberts, T Russon, P Sahota, I Sandall, A Smith, E Stafford, D Stanley, A Taylor, E Taylor, J Thorne, A Tromans, S Turner, M Webb and K Westwood together with the Deputy Chief Executive and other Officers.

16 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors A Aston, C Eccles and M Hanif.

The Mayor conveyed the Council's best wishes to Councillor M Hanif for a speedy recovery to good health.

17 **Declarations of Interest**

Declarations of interests, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, were made by the following Members:

Councillors A Goddard and A Taylor - Any matters relating to Castle Hill development and all references to Dudley Zoo - Non-pecuniary interests as Members of Dudley and West Midlands Zoological Society Limited.

Councillors K Archer and I Kettle - West Midlands Combined Authority – Transport Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Non-pecuniary interests as Members of the Committee.

Councillor K Casey – Pecuniary interest in any matters directly affecting his employment with West Midlands Combined Authority.

Councillor I Bevan – Any references to Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust/Russells Hall Hospital – Pecuniary interest in any matters directly affecting his employment.

Councillor C Bayton – Any references to West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority - Non-pecuniary interest as a Member of the Authority.

Councillor E Taylor - Non-pecuniary interest as her daughter was employed by Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust.

Councillor S Henley – Any references to matters affecting West Midlands Fire Service – Pecuniary interest in any matters directly affecting his employment.

Councillor J Foster – Any references to West Midlands Employers (WME) - Pecuniary interests in any matters directly affecting her self-employment as a HR consultant/investigator with WME as a client.

18 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the annual meeting held on 16th May, 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed.

19 **Mayor's Announcements**

(a) **Members of Parliament**

The Mayor extended congratulations to Alex Ballinger, Antonia Bance, Cat Eccles, Sonia Kumar and Mike Wood on their election (or re-election) to Parliament in July, 2024.

(b) Charity Cricket Match

To be held on 26th July, 2024 at Stourbridge Cricket Club.

20 **2023/24 Provisional Revenue and Capital Outturn and Medium Term Financial Strategy**

A report of the Cabinet was submitted.

The recommendations of the Cabinet were moved by Councillor P Harley and seconded by Councillor P Bradley.

Following the debate, Councillor P Harley exercised his right of reply pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 14.9.

The motion was put to the meeting and it was

Resolved

That the decisions and recommendations of the Cabinet be noted and approved as follows:

- (1) That the draft General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) outturns for 2023/24 be noted.
- (2) That the effect of the General Fund outturn on Unallocated General Fund balances as at 31st March 2024 be noted.
- (3) That the proposed savings set out in paragraph 22 and Appendix F to the report be approved as a basis for scrutiny.
- (4) That the Director of Environment be authorised to progress with on street parking charges and charging on currently free car parks, as set out in paragraph 25 of the report, subject to associated capital and revenue budget changes being approved by the Cabinet and Council.
- (5) That up to £60,000 of budget be brought forward from 2027/28 to year 2024/25 of the Capital programme for works at Tiled House.
- (6) That the additional capital budget of £1.9m for the Energy from Waste plant works be approved.

- (7) That the amended allocation in the Capital Programme for the UK Sustained Prosperity Funding be approved.
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21 **Annual Report of the Audit and Standards Committee 2023/24**

A report of the Audit and Standards Committee was submitted.

It was moved by Councillor K Denning, seconded by Councillor A Qayyum and

Resolved

That the report be received and noted.

22 **Treasury Management**

A report of the Audit and Standards Committee was submitted.

It was moved by Councillor K Denning, seconded by Councillor A Qayyum and

Resolved

That the report be received and noted.

23 **Constitution and Related Matters**

A report of the Lead for Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) was submitted.

It was moved by Councillor P Harley, seconded by Councillor P Bradley and

Resolved

- (1) That the updates made to the Constitution, following the Annual Meeting of the Council on 16th May, 2024, be noted.
- (2) That Councillor D Roberts be elected as Vice-Chair of the Children's Services Select Committee for the remainder of the 2024/25 municipal year.

- (3) That the Council endorse the designation of Member Champions as set out in paragraph 10 of the report.
 - (4) That, in accordance with statutory requirements, the Council establish an Independent Remuneration Panel comprising three Independent Persons.
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24 **Notices of Motion**

(a) **Police Station Closures**

Pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 12, Councillor S Phipps had given notice of a motion, as set out in the agenda, on 16th May, 2024.

An amendment from Councillor K Casey was circulated at the meeting. Councillor S Phipps indicated that with the consent of the meeting, and pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 14.7, he would alter the motion to incorporate elements of the proposed amendment.

The altered motion was moved by Councillor S Phipps and seconded by Councillor A Davies.

Councillor S Phipps exercised his right to reply pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 14.9.

The motion was put to the meeting and it was

Resolved that

Crime and anti-social behaviour is one of the top issues raised by residents across communities in Dudley, with officers being visible and based in their local communities key to combatting those concerns.

This Council recognises that West Midlands Police funding has been affected by national spending reductions and in line with Dudley Council's fair funding campaign that is endorsed by both main political parties it is also recognised that a fairer funding is needed for other local authorities including West Midlands Police.

Despite the context of reduced funding, this Council welcomes the significant investment in a brand-new multi-million pound and fit-for-purpose police station at the Castlegate Complex, as well as 124 new officers for the borough.

In a report to the West Midlands Strategic Police and Crime Board in October 2023, clear commitments were made that any stations closing would only take place after Neighbourhood Policing Teams are relocated to local bases.

This Council notes the efforts of Members across the Chamber in securing commitments from the Police and Crime Commissioner, the progress made on a new base in Stourbridge, and re-iterates the extreme importance of ensuring new local community bases are opened before any station closures occur.

This Council therefore resolves to:

- Instruct the Chief Executive to write to the Chief Constable of West Midlands Police requesting a meeting with elected Members to discuss the progress of and future plans for police bases located in communities.
 - Instruct the Leader of the Council to write to West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner, Simon Foster, informing him of this motion and requesting that he re-affirm his commitment to new police bases in Stourbridge, Halesowen and Brierley Hill, as well as his further assurances that stations will not be closed until these bases have been found and teams re-located.
 - Instruct the Deputy Chief Executive to continue her work with stakeholders to consider options for the retention of Brierley Hill Police Station building for public sector use including a West Midlands Police usage preferably consisting of a neighbourhood and response policing team and a publicly accessible front desk.
 - Request the Chairs of the relevant Your Home, Your Forum meetings to include an agenda item to discuss these issues and extend an invitation to West Midlands Police to discuss proposals.
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(b) Plan for Tackling Trees on Council Land Causing Extreme Nuisance

Pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 12, Councillor S Keasey had given notice of a motion, as set out in the agenda, on 17th June, 2024.

The motion was moved by Councillor S Keasey and seconded by Councillor J Foster.

Following a debate, Councillor S Keasey exercised his right to reply pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 14.9.

The motion was put to the meeting and it was

Resolved that

This Council instructs the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services to draw up a comprehensive plan for addressing trees on Council land that cause extreme nuisance. This plan should include:

1. A clear definition of what constitutes an 'extreme' nuisance in terms of trees.
2. Specific actions that can be taken to mitigate such nuisances.
3. A realistic assessment of the potential costs associated with implementing these actions.

Trees are undeniably a beautiful and integral part of our landscape, providing numerous environmental and aesthetic benefits. They enhance the visual appeal of our neighbourhoods, improve air quality, and offer habitats for wildlife. However, it is also acknowledged that in certain situations, trees can become a source of significant nuisance to residents.

Examples of such nuisances include:

- Blocking natural daylight, thereby reducing the quality of life and increasing costs for those affected.
- Physical contact with properties, potentially causing damage or posing safety risks.
- Excessive leaf drop during autumn, leading to clogged drains, slippery paths, and increased maintenance requirements.

Currently, Council policy addresses trees that are dead, dying, or dangerous. While this policy is essential for managing immediate safety concerns, it does not adequately cover scenarios where trees cause extreme nuisance but do not fall into the aforementioned categories.

Expanding the policy to include trees causing extreme nuisance is necessary for the following reasons:

- Quality of Life: Prolonged reduction in daylight can lead to increased energy consumption and negatively impact mental health and well-being.
- Property Damage: Trees that physically touch or overhang properties can cause structural damage, potentially leading to costly repairs.
- Maintenance and Safety: Excessive leaf drop can create hazardous conditions on public pathways and increase the burden on municipal maintenance services.

Specific proposals are:

1. Definition of Extreme Nuisance: Develop a comprehensive definition that includes criteria such as the degree of daylight blockage, proximity to property and volume of leaf drop.
2. Mitigation Actions: Outline practical steps that can be taken to reduce the nuisance, such as pruning, crown thinning, or selective removal. Establish guidelines for prioritising actions based on the severity of the nuisance and the impact on residents.
3. Cost Assessment: Evaluate the financial implications of implementing these measures, including both initial costs and potential long-term savings from reduced maintenance and damage prevention.

By addressing these issues, the Council can balance the preservation of our natural landscape with the need to ensure a high quality of life for all residents.

Instructing the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services to develop this plan will demonstrate our commitment to proactive and responsive governance. It will ensure that our policies evolve to meet the changing needs of our community, safeguarding both our natural environment and the well-being of our residents.

The Council hereby approves this motion and instructs the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services to present the outlined plan at the next appropriate meeting.

25 **Questions from Members (Council Procedure Rule 11)**

Questions to the Leader, Cabinet Members and Chairs

The Leader of the Council (Councillor P Harley) responded to a question from Councillor P Lowe concerning potential civic recognition, including the Freedom of the Borough, for Jude Bellingham.

The Leader of the Council (Councillor P Harley) responded to questions from Councillor K Westwood concerning support for the International Festival of Glass and the possibility of future Black Country Festival of Glass events being held in the Borough.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities (Councillor I Bevan) responded to questions from Councillor J Cowell relating to the decent homes standard, the ongoing stock condition survey, the potential disposal of properties and response times to deal with serious issues associated with the Council's housing stock.

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services (Councillor D Corfield) responded to questions from Councillor R Priest concerning the maintenance of and improvements to the Borough's green spaces, playing fields and the progress made to improve football pitches where necessary improvements had been identified, including Homer Hill Park.

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services (Councillor D Corfield) responded to a question from Councillor E Stafford concerning problems and nuisance associated with fly tipping and the issue of fixed penalty notices.

The Leader of the Council (Councillor P Harley) responded to questions from Councillor B Collins concerning a petition from residents of the Squirrels Estate opposing the roll-out of overhead infrastructure for the provision of full fibre internet; concerns about consultation; the making of representations about changes to the existing system for permitted development and the possibility of constituting formal groups to consider crowdfunding for potential legal action in a democratic and governed manner.

The Leader of the Council (Councillor P Harley) responded to questions from Councillor A Tromans concerning hair driers not working at the Crystal Leisure Centre; the situation regarding the Woodlands House and Rosemary Court Care Homes and potential mixed messages being given regarding the Council's spending restrictions.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities (Councillor I Bevan) responded to a question from Councillor C Bayton concerning the deployment of mobile CCTV cameras. The matter would be investigated.

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services (Councillor D Corfield) responded to questions from Councillor S Turner concerning the state of grass verges, grass at the front of Council properties and delays in cutting grass, which were being dealt with by the appropriate teams.

At this juncture, the Mayor indicated that the 30 minutes allowed for questions had expired.

26 **Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business for consideration at this meeting.

The meeting ended at 7.15 pm

MAYOR