

# Council Minutes

Date: 10 December 2018

Time: 6.30 - 8.42 pm

**PRESENT:** Councillor A R Green (in the Chair)

Councillors Mrs J A Adey, Mrs S Adoh, K Ahmed, Z Ahmed, M C Appleyard, M Asif, D H G Barnes, Ms A Baughan, S Broadbent, Miss S Brown, D J Carroll, M Clarke, Mrs L M Clarke OBE, A D Collingwood, M P Davy, R Farmer, R Gaffney, S Graham, G C Hall, M Hanif, M Harris, M A Hashmi, A Hussain, M Hussain, M Hussain JP, D A Johncock, Mrs G A Jones, M E Knight, Mrs J D Langley, Mrs W J Mallen, N B Marshall, H L McCarthy, I L McEnnis, Ms C J Oliver, B E Pearce, G Peart, S K Raja, R Raja, S Saddique, J A Savage, R J Scott, D A C Shakespeare OBE, N J B Teesdale, A Turner, P R Turner, Ms J D Wassell, D M Watson, C Whitehead and Ms K S Wood and Honorary Alderman R Pushman.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H Bull, C Etholen, C B Harriss, A E Hill, D Knights, A Lee, R Newman, Mrs J E Teesdale, R Wilson and L Wood and Honorary Aldermen J Blanksby, E Collins, Mrs K Peatey and Mrs P Priestley.

## 53 MINUTES

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 8 October 2018 along with those of the Special Council of 26 November 2018 be confirmed as true records and signed by the Chairman.

## 54 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

## 55 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reported on his recent engagements carried out since the last Full Council;

- Welcoming the Duchess of Wessex at the Air Ambulance Headquarters;
- Similarly welcoming the Duke of Kent on his visit to Cressex to award 2 local companies with the Queen's Award for enterprise;
- Accompanying the Lord Lieutenant for Buckinghamshire at the South East Reserve Forces and Cadets Association awards ceremony;
- A considerable number of Remembrance Day events given the centenary of the end of World War One, including the 'Battle's Over – Nations Tribute'

event, wreath laying at the War Memorial and the Remembrance Day Parade and Service at All Saints' High Wycombe along with the Beacon Lighting at Tom Burt's Hill; and

- The Wycombe District Sports Award event at Bisham Abbey and the similar Bucks and Milton Keynes event at the Waterside Theatre, Aylesbury.

## **56 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

### **a) Question from Mr N Vickery JP to the Leader of the Council.**

Can the Leader of the Council please set out her and her Cabinets position on the future of Governance for the Town of High Wycombe post Unitary Authority launch in April 2020?

### **Verbal reply given by Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).**

I cannot speak for my Cabinet members. My primary concern is the future governance of the District. I suspect we shall hear rather more about the views of Members of this Council on Town governance later on in this meeting but what we do know is that we will have a new Unitary District Council for Buckinghamshire which will serve the Town of High Wycombe and we need to do everything we can to ensure that the new unitary Council is set up in a way that will best serve all our residents including our Town residents, and I am working hard to ensure that is what happens.

### **Supplementary Question**

I get the feeling that this will be a case of too little too late. Why can't you and your Cabinet agree this Local Governance Review now, to give this town the same representation as all other residents of the District, such as those served by Marlow and Princes Risborough Town Councils and Chepping Wycombe Parish Council etc.?

### **Supplementary Response**

I pointed out in my first response that I did not speak for my Cabinet Members, we will hear later at this meeting the views of Members on this subject.

### **b) Question from Mr R Colomb to the Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources.**

In view of the impending demise of Wycombe District Council and its replacement by a Unitary Authority subsuming all the District and County Authorities, what steps is this Authority taking to ensure that the hard earned reserves that have been accumulated over the years and as you stated two Council Meetings ago are earmarked for projects within the District are in fact spent on these District projects and not lost to other priorities in other parts of Buckinghamshire?

**Verbal reply given by Councillor D Watson (Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources).**

Thank you Mr Colomb for your question and interest in these matters.

As a consequence of the sound financial management of public funds over many years, including the period during the time when you were the Council leader, the District Council has the benefit of a strong balance sheet having considerable reserves and with no borrowing.

The general fund reserve as at March 31<sup>st</sup> 2018 was £9.8M with earmarked reserves of £40.2M, Capital Receipts of £16.8M and Capital Grants of £7.4M i.e. a total of £74.4M of Usable reserves.

Given the strong balance sheet the following is planned:

- The Council is continuing to invest during both 18/19 and 19/20 across the District for the benefit of local residents and will be applying its reserves in investing in the schemes to support the economic development, regeneration and place shaping aspirations of this Council. Tens of millions of major project expenditure, where there is a sound business case, is currently planned for delivery during the period from now up to end of 19/20;
- Retain a 15% reserve for unforeseen net expenditure – for the so called “unknown unknowns” i.e. £2.1M;
- The local government financial settlement, postponed from last week is still to be announced. Should the need arise we intend to be in a position to mitigate any major decrease in New Homes Business, Business Rates, negative Revenue Support Grant or internally generated income the council receives e.g. rents and fees/charges;
- Set aside funds for transition costs with regard to the formation of a new authority;
- Maintain a low level of council tax;
- Continue to do what we can to support the local economy; and
- Effect potential land acquisitions in support of the Local Plan.

It is anticipated that Wycombe District Council Usable reserves will be considerably reduced during the next year or so but, I have to say, that it is unlikely that all the accumulated reserves from past years will be spent only within the District. Those members of the new authority, elected from the former Wycombe District, will I suggest, have a responsibility to ensure that the former Wycombe council tax payers receive a fair share of spending during the years ahead.

**Supplementary Question**

Do you share my belief that the residents of Wycombe District and especially of High Wycombe Town will be the most financially disadvantaged under the new Unitary set up? They will see loss of reserves and swingeing tax increases, Wycombe District Council has been well run, do you share my concerns?

### **Supplementary Response**

Yes I do share your concerns, I am proud Wycombe District Council has consistently had the lowest Council Tax in Buckinghamshire. When harmonised; this will have a disproportional impact on these local tax payer, I hope a phased period of time can be utilised for this.

### **c) Question from Mr P Crotty to the Cabinet Member for Housing.**

In 2011 WDC sold assets including all of our council housing stock to Red Kite for just a few percent of its value.

What action does WDC propose now that Red Kite is proposing to sell some of those assets via subsidiary companies without having created the now overdue Star Block development under its contract with WDC?

### **Verbal reply given by Councillor Mrs J Langley (Cabinet Member for Housing).**

Good evening Mr Crotty and thank you for your question. The transfer process was extremely complex and there are a good number of Councillors in the room who will concur with that. It was driven by a set of Government rules that included how the homes were valued, we had little to do with this.

In reference to your remarks regards Red Kite selling some of their assets via subsidiary companies. The two subsidiary companies you refer to are wholly owned by Red Kite, there are no shareholders who can take money out.

Red Kite and Twenty 11 are both charitable purpose organisations, any surpluses generated has to be re-invested. They are a tax efficient means of ensuring any surplus generated can be returned to one of the charitable companies to use for its charitable purposes.

Here at Wycombe District Council, Members and Officers are working with Red Kite with regard to their Twenty 11 pilot scheme and look forward to discussing the independent review of this pilot scheme with them in due course.

The Castlefield / Star Blocks scheme is a large project and not without risks. It is an ambitious scheme. Replacing 97 homes with 184 brand new ones is their biggest development scheme so far.

Red Kite are developing proposals for a planning application; discussions are ongoing with officers and Members.

### **Supplementary Question**

Irrespective of the Star Block development, the 2011 deal now leaves us poorer by hundreds of millions of pounds. The Regulator for Social Housing confirms that WDC's contract arrangement with Red Kite was quite legal. Assuming that this advice is accurate is there any other alternative for WDC constituents than to assume that WDC has behaved negligently on a grand scale?

### **Supplementary Response**

Red Kite and Twenty 11 if they are to develop new homes at rents local people can afford, they need to subsidise the build costs with the profit from these companies.

I think it is important to make it clear that since the transfer Wycombe District Council are not involved in the day to day business of Red Kite.

Regular meetings take place with Red Kite which include the Deputy Leader (Dominic Barnes) the Cabinet Member for Planning (David Johncock), myself and senior officers.

Wycombe District Council also has two nominees on the board of Red Kite. They are both very experienced councillors: Councillors Ian McEnnis and Paul Turner.

#### **d) Question from Dr L Derrick to the Leader of the Council.**

WDC's website says it is the responsibility of councillors to "represent constituents and help with their enquiries".

Can Cllr Wood confirm that she believes that as a minimum Ward Councillors should respond when approached by local constituents?

#### **Verbal reply given by Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).**

Thank you for your question. Of course we like to be responsive, but it is not always possible or appropriate to respond to every email that is received, particularly when some emails are circular and sent to large groups electronically. This type of email may not get answered and I think it is up to each member to consider whether to respond having considered all the circumstances of the case but in general, yes I do expect members to respond to members of the public who raise specific concerns about difficulties they are facing and for which they need their councillor's help.

### **Supplementary Question**

During the course of delivering her address / question, the Chairman considered Dr Derek was introducing a new topic and ruled that it was not valid. He therefore did not permit it to be asked in compliance with Standing Order 10.4.

**e) Question from Mr A Walker to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Regeneration.**

Would the Council be prepared to suspend the attempt to Compulsory Purchase the Brunel Shed in the forecourt of High Wycombe Station for up to three months, whilst a group of Community Based Organisations seek to develop an alternative plan for the re-generation and re-purposing of the Building?

**Verbal reply given by Councillor S Broadbent (Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Regeneration).**

It is heartening that there is public interest in the re-purposing of the Brunel Shed and that local groups seek to develop plans for one potential vision for the future use of the shed. However, the building has lain empty for a decade and none of the many plans which have arisen over that period have come to fruition. This is fundamentally why the Council has taken the step of deciding to compulsorily purchase the Brunel Shed: as long as the building is not in the possession of the Council its condition, its listed status, and the commercial requirements of its owners will mean that regeneration is not economically viable. The compulsory purchase process does not preclude any alternative plan so there is no reason to delay pursuing it. It should be noted there has been interest from various members of the public with suggestions and requests as to how the building will be used; these will be taken into account as part of the development of a formal business case for the future use of the Brunel Shed in due course.

**Supplementary Question**

High Wycombe Model Railway Club of which I am a member have a number of members who work for Chiltern Railways and Network Rail who are aware of the complex legal conflict in respect of the ownership/ use of this building between Chiltern Rail, the Department of Transport and Network Rail. Do you not think a meeting should be convened of community based organisations to discuss the propositions for the use of this important community asset?

**Supplementary Response**

Thank you, a CPO (Compulsory Purchase Order) is not entered into lightly, it is a last resort, but we want to establish a future for this building. The situation between Network Rail, Chiltern Rail and the Department does not involve Wycombe District Council. Public interest in the building will of course be taken into account during the consultation stage that has to be carried out in order to complete the CPO.

**57 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS**

**a) Question from Councillor R Raja to the Leader of the Council**

The multi-year capital programme envisages spending in excess of £86M after the date of unitarisation.

Would the leader like to inform us of the mechanism which will guarantee that these commitments will be met?

**Verbal reply given by Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).**

As you say the Council is continuing to invest in the District and has set out in the draft Capital programme its plans for future years.

Many of these projects run over multiple years and once a contract has been signed then the new council will have to honour the commitments made by this Council. We will continue to make informed decisions based on sound and robust Business Cases so we do not think that the new Council would not wish to pursue good sensible schemes that have benefits for the community and deliver Value for Money for those schemes where we have not signed contracts.

However we are not in a position to guarantee delivery but we are making sure that we can take all reasonable steps to expedite delivery of schemes by accelerating work into this year if necessary and by examining potential areas of blockage to free up resources and to remove obstacles.

**Supplementary Question**

It is understandable that you can't give us guarantees, I think that the view of the new Unitary authority will see common sense prevail. What will you put in place to ensure what has been in the pipeline will be delivered?

**Supplementary Response**

As I said, we will take all reasonable steps to expedite delivery of schemes by accelerating work into this year if necessary and by examining areas of blockage to free up resources and to remove obstacles according to the said business cases.

**b) Question from Councillor M Knight to the Leader of the Council**

As the Bucks County Council consultation on Early Help Services comes to an end this week we are closer to knowing which Children's Centres are going to be closed. In the proposals this includes the closure of both east Wycombe Children's Centres at Ash Hill School in Micklefield and the Hampden Way centre which serves Totteridge and Bowerdean.

It has been suggested that local residents and organisations could be offered the chance to keep these facilities open. What support could Wycombe District Council offer to help residents who wanted to do this?

**Verbal reply given by Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).**

Thank you for your question, although I believe it may be a little premature. The County is out to consultation at the moment and the proposed closures are one of three options, albeit BCC's preferred option. If Option B is supported there are actually seven children's centres across the District that would close. This Council cannot pick up the bill for all of those services.

In any case BCC is consulting on alternative uses of the buildings with the stated preference that in all cases formal nursery or other early years' provision would be favoured. If you wish to take on the two buildings you mention you would be best advised to engage actively in the consultation and work closely with BCC. I am sure this would involve the development of robust business cases, which would give more clarity on any financial needs you may have. This Council cannot issue a blanket guarantee of financial support, but if there is a solid business case for investment I would be willing to consider it as part of overall budget setting.

### **Supplementary Question**

Lots of residents in my ward are very concerned, it is an area of need where families need the support these centres provide. Would you be prepared to work with residents in respect of this provision?

### **Supplementary Response**

Personally I do not have the skills needed, but I can speak with you outside this Meeting to look at this issue.

### **c) Question from Councillor B Pearce to the Leader of the Council**

Do you agree with me that now it is likely we will be having a Unitary Authority (a shame it's not going to be two) that it would be a good and prudent idea if a sub-committee could be set up in order to discuss the possibility of having a High Wycombe Town Council?

### **Verbal reply to be given by Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).**

Thank you for your question Councillor Pearce it seems that there will be an opportunity later on the agenda to consider this question. I therefore don't think there will need to be a separate committee meeting to discuss it.

### **Supplementary Question**

I have no supplementary question it was effectively put by Mr Vickery earlier during Public Questions, thank you.

### **d) Question from Councillor M Hanif to the Cabinet Member for Environment**

In October WDC cabinet approved an AQAP (Air Quality Action Plan) responding to poor air quality around High Wycombe, mainly from traffic. This plan was a watered down version from the aspirations of the steering group who were involved in its early stages. The plan fell short of addressing the challenging but fundamental issues of how to get people out of their cars and onto their feet, cycles and public transport. Also through public consultation 41 respondents submitted in depth comments and suggested amended actions. Yet no change to draft plan was made.



Are these consultations just a waste of time and provide good reasons for people to become cynical about consultations?

**Verbal reply given by Councillor Mrs J Adey (Cabinet Member for Environment).**

I have a feeling of 'deja-vu' in that I have already responded to a similar question in the Bucks Free Press recently.

The action plan to help improve air quality in the Wycombe District was the result of lengthy negotiations between Wycombe District Council, Buckinghamshire County Council and local transport providers, in addition to strong input from community and environmental groups, including Wycombe Friends of the Earth. We also had a number of comments from members of the public which we took into consideration.

Tackling poor air quality at a local level is a complex task, particularly when so much depends on national policy and industry standards, and so I share your frustration in that the current air quality action plan perhaps doesn't go far enough. That being said, we have agreed 25 actions that fall into three broad themes: national legislation and local policies; transport and infrastructure; and public engagement and behaviour. We hope to start progressing some of these actions in the New Year and will also be taking forward other suggestions that were made, along with other initiatives, which don't currently feature in the plan. For example, officers are currently seeking funding for a study into the potential feasibility of a low emissions zone in the areas with the highest levels of air pollution, which could bring in controls to limit older, more polluting vehicles - be they private cars, passenger carrying vehicles large and small, or those moving freight. I admit that this could be a drastic measure, and, subject to our funding application of course, clearly a lot of work is required to establish how this might work and what the ultimate benefits would be, but it is an area that I feel is worth exploring, as something that is within the remit of local government to introduce.

We'll keep the plan under regular review, so we can account for technological and scientific advancements and new legislative powers. And we're committed to producing additional planning guidance, particularly in the field of electric vehicle charging point provision; that will result in additional schemes to help tackle poor air quality.

With respect to the question raised about the value of consultation, it is clear to me that we would not have an action plan at all without the consultation that has taken place – the actions have, after all, been developed with our consultees! However, if after further consultation, additional suggestions are made, then of course it is not always possible to satisfy all concerned, and a balance has to be struck, with compromises made. Hopefully though as our plan develops and its impacts are reviewed, additional measures can be justified and introduced to tackle our local air quality problems.

**Supplementary Question**

Local Authorities have a legal duty in respect of Air Quality Management, other authorities are developing ambitious programmes. Would you say Wycombe District Council has failed in not providing a solid and robust scheme?

## **Supplementary Response**

No I would not. We are working to establish a good scheme for our residents.

### **e) Question from Councillor M Harris to the Cabinet Member for Environment**

Given the publicity around plastic in our oceans, I have residents asking what happens to the plastic in their recycling bin if it is recyclable. They would also like to know what happens if it's in the recycling bin but is not recyclable. And what if they put recyclable products in the landfill bin by mistake.

Could I ask the Cabinet Member to clarify the processes?

### **Verbal reply given by Councillor Mrs J Adey (Cabinet Member for Environment).**

Mixed recyclables presented in the blue bins are collected and bulked at the London Road depot in Amersham, for transfer by road to materials recovery facilities (MRFs) situated in other parts of the UK. Plastic bottles are sorted from the other materials present in the mixture and separated into different streams according to the type of plastic present.

The different types of plastic bottles are formed into bales and then shipped to re-processors in the UK and Europe, sometimes further afield. The plastic bottles are then re-processed to provide raw materials for the manufacture of new products. Recent information shows that an average of approximately 10% of the plastic bottles collected in Wycombe may eventually leave the UK or Europe for recycling purposes. These destination countries include Malaysia, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Indonesia and India.

If non-recyclable material is presented in the mix which arrives at the MRF, the various processes and technologies in use at the facility will cause it to be separated from the useful material. The unwanted material is then disposed of and depending on the MRF in question it will be used for energy recovery.

Any plastic present in the residual waste bin will be disposed of in a compliant manner. In Wycombe District this means it will be collected along with the other residual waste, bulked at the High Heavens transfer station by the Waste Disposal Authority (Buckinghamshire County Council) and transported for energy recovery at the Greatmoor energy from waste facility.

Plastics presented by Wycombe residents in the blue bins will be recycled, or if presented in the grey bins, plastic bottles will be treated as residual waste and disposed of properly by our contractors. Recycling materials collected from the kerbside by the Council's contractor and sent for sorting, bulking and onward transportation are subject to a regulatory process. This regulatory 'duty of care' requires that waste is only ever transferred to an authorised operator who has a valid registration as a carrier, broker or dealer of waste, or a waste management operator who has an environmental permit. Only reputable and compliant

contractors are used. Operators of MRFs like those used by the Council are required to keep records and report to the regulator details of what they send out, every three months. To check on all this, the Joint Waste Team has its own programme of 'duty of care' visits. All contractors taking recycling from us are visited, and the officers satisfy themselves that the operators are meeting the requirements of the legislation and all the necessary documentation is up to date and compliant. We recently visited Crayford MRF for this purpose and all was found to be in order.

### **Supplementary Question**

Is there any way that plastics from my ward residents ends up in the oceans?

### **Supplementary Response**

The Chances are exceedingly small, in that it is believed that only 0.03% of the plastics found in oceans comes from the UK.

### **f) Question from Councillor M A Hashmi to the Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources**

Online shopping has become a fact of life and continues to grow.

Is it not time for WDC to seriously consider the overhaul of the business rates system so that high street shops are not paying four times as much in business rates as their online rivals?

### **Verbal reply given by Councillor D Watson (Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources).**

Business rates are an important source of local government funding but it is administered as a national scheme. The charge is based on a rateable value set by the Valuation Officer Agency, multiplied by a "multiplier" set by the Government. Whilst Local Authorities collect Business Rates they have no discretion to change this national system. The rateable values are calculated differently for different types of businesses according to the type of property, but as a general rule are based on the estimated rental value of the property on the open market. The calculation of Rateable Values by the Valuation Office Agency is a specialised area of work. Local Authorities have no input to the Valuation process. It is up to central government to overhaul business rates.

Both the Government and WDC recognises that changing consumer behaviour presents a significant challenge for retailers in our town centres and is taking action to help the high street evolve. The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the Budget on 29 October 2018 that the Government was giving Local Authorities discretion to operate a business rates Retail Discount scheme for occupied retail properties with a rateable value of less than £51,000 in each of the years 2019-20

and 2020-21. The value of this discount will be one third of the net rate bill and will be available to qualifying business ratepayers from April.

At a local level Wycombe offers a range of reliefs as permitted by the National Legislation, including Small Business Rate Relief; Rural Rate Relief; Mandatory and Discretionary Rate Reliefs. In particular it is worth highlighting the Discretionary Business Rate scheme which helps local businesses with a rateable value below £200,000 that faced a large increase in business rates between 2016 and 2017. The Council has awarded over £150,000 Discretionary Business Rate Relief in the current year and will continue to offer support for the final two years of the scheme, using the funds made available.

The council will continue to explore all options that are within its statutory powers to help local retailers. Officers work hard to maximise discretionary schemes where they can.

### **Supplementary Question**

Councillor Hashmi had no supplementary question.

### **g) Question from Councillor K Ahmed to the Cabinet Member for Environment**

Wycombe District & Chiltern District councils' are currently undertaking a procurement exercise to seek tenders for a new 10 year contract to provide a joint waste, recycling and cleansing contract.

Given that the future of these councils in their existing format is limited, therefore is it wise to tie them into a 10 year contract?

### **Verbal reply given by Councillor Mrs J Adey (Cabinet Member for Environment).**

The three Councils in the Joint Waste Partnership are procuring a new refuse, recycling and street cleaning contract, planned to start in June 2020. Contract commencement date will therefore be after the inception of the new unitary authority, which is likely to be in April 2020. Any contracts in place with the districts would be novated to the new unitary authority at this time.

There is a statutory duty on the district councils to collect waste, and residents require a well-managed, good quality, value for money service to be in place, without even a single day's break in provision. Clearly the waste collection duty would transfer into the new unitary authority on its start date and so a procurement exercise is required to ensure that there is a supplier in place after the existing contractual arrangement ends.

The opportunity being offered by the procurement process is for an initial 10 years. The length of contract has been chosen as it offers a reasonable period of stability and an attractive commercial opportunity for any provider. It also reflects the expected service life of the principal assets, which are the waste collection vehicles. Shorter contracts may therefore not offer good value for money to the councils or

may not be commercially attractive to contractors in what is a busy procurement market place for these services. An unattractive bidding opportunity represents a risk to the districts and any successor authority and should therefore be avoided.

It is therefore sensible to continue as we are, all the while making information available as appropriate on progress with the procurement of the planned new contract, for governance purposes.'

### **Supplementary Question**

I note the three District Councils merging in respect of this contract. But there are 4 in the new Unitary Council, are not Aylesbury Vale District Council out of this opportunity, is a short term contract not a ten year one a better idea?

### **Supplementary Response**

I have given my reasons already for this contract, Aylesbury Vale have in-house provision; we have always worked well together in respect of waste collection amongst the 3 southern authorities of Buckinghamshire.

### **h) Question from Councillor B Pearce to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Regeneration**

When the Pound Shop closed in High Wycombe, we were all concerned that yet another empty shop had appeared on the High Street but lo and behold, a shop very similar opened within a very short time of the initial closure.

Was this a pure coincidence or was this due to hard work by council officials?

### **Verbal reply given by Councillor S Broadbent (Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Regeneration).**

Though I recognise the comprehensive and sustained work of officers at the Council in respect of regeneration and economic development; the Council are not able to take credit in this instance.

Pound World on the High Street in High Wycombe closed in August. It was bought out by Pound Stretcher (their 8<sup>th</sup> Pound World store buy out) and re-opened the store in September after a refit.

### **Supplementary Question**

Councillor Pearce had no supplementary question.

### **i) Question from Councillor M Hanif to the Cabinet Member for Environment**

A survey by the Gambling Commission has found that 89% of pubs failed to prevent children playing 18-plus gaming machines. The LGA (Local Government

Association) has joined the Gambling Commission in calling on the industry to address the findings of this report and take urgent action to prevent young people from developing possible gambling problems as they grow older.

Surely WDC will be coming into contact with people impacted by gambling through a range of services, including housing and homelessness, financial inclusions and addiction services. This survey sends a clear signal that addressing problem gambling is a priority not just for public health and licensing but for the whole council and its wider stakeholders, thereby facilitating cooperation across departments and with local communities and partners.

What actions are WDC taking to strengthen work in this area?

**Verbal reply given by Councillor Mrs J Adey (Cabinet Member for Environment).**

Officers have no evidence of children playing 18 plus gaming machines and haven't received any specific information that it is an issue in the Wycombe area. I can assure you that officers would take action if they noted this during their routine inspections or if they received a complaint. However in light of the recently issued report they intend to carry out further checks in relevant premises.

The anti-social behaviour team, the police and licensing undertake routine test purchase operations in licensed premises to ensure they are adhering to their licence thereby safeguarding young people. Whilst this focuses on CSE (Child Sexual Exploitation) and the sale of alcohol to minors, it raises their awareness of general safeguarding of young people in their premises. In addition, information is shared with hotels and pubs as part of Hotel Watch, so if there is a campaign or information available, this can be shared with them.

With regard to housing and homelessness our recording systems do not record details of clients affected by gambling addictions and as such we only have anecdotal evidence of cases of homelessness caused by gambling addictions.

Officers have advised that they have not seen a disproportionate number of homeless households presenting as a result of gambling addictions.

**Supplementary Question**

Councillor Hanif had no supplementary question.

**j) Question from Councillor M Knight to the Leader of the Council**

Last December I asked you a question about Frogmoor and wanting to reclaim it as a place where all members of our community could feel welcome and safe.

Could you give us an update on what progress has been made to both reduce antisocial behaviour and generally improve the public realm in that part of High Wycombe?

### **Verbal reply given by Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).**

Thank you for your question. I am very happy to update you on progress as town centre issues have been a key focus of my administration over the past year. You will be aware of the Anti-Social Behaviour Task and Finish Group report that Cabinet responded to last month. Our response included a public commitment to fund a one year pilot for High Wycombe Street Wardens, who will have the powers to address issues within the town. We expect to have the team in place in April 2019 and discussions have already taken place with local police and the BidCo to ensure all our town centre teams work together to achieve maximum benefit.

I will also be sharing very shortly with all Members the details of some modest improvements we plan to make to Frogmoor in the spring to address the concerns around safety, inappropriate parking and the unwelcoming environment. This involves improvements to seating, paving and lighting, which, twin-tracked with the advent of the Street Warden team, will encourage positive use of Frogmoor while tackling less desirable uses.

We know our residents are keen to help those in need, but this help needs to be appropriate so we are also close to finalising publicity with Wycombe Homeless Connection on the help people can provide to services for rough sleepers, which we all hope very much will reduce begging around the town. I am also looking forward to working with the new BidCo Manager, Melanie Williams, to ensure that the town welcomes visitors and supports local businesses by providing an attractive and safe environment.

In the meantime the multi-agency Street Community Group continues to work with those most in need so that they can make the changes they need to in order to move on with their lives.

### **Supplementary Question**

I recognise and commend the work of the Anti-Social Behaviour Task and Finish Group and welcome Cabinet's support of the Group's recommendation in respect of wardens.

In respect of the modest improvements in Frogmoor referenced by the Leader in her response, could she confirm that these were inspired by the CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) bid prepared by Councillor Ms Wassell re table tennis tables and band stands etc.?

### **Supplementary Response**

No these were not inspired by that bid, these were underway before that CIL bid received.



Notice had been given that two petitions would be handed in.

- The first was presented by Cllr Julia Wassell, and was a petition by the residents of Totteridge for a Community Governance Review with a view to forming a Parish Council in Totteridge.
- The second was presented by Cllr Andrea Baughan and was a petition by the residents of Micklefield for a Community Governance Review with a view to forming a Parish Council in Micklefield.

It was noted that both petitions fell under the provisions of 2007 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act for Community Governance Review petitions. The provisions of that legislation took precedence over the Council's petition scheme. This legislation included the requirement to validate the petitions. Members and the lead petitioners would be informed outside of the meeting how the petition would be administered following that validation process.

If either of the petitions resulted in a review, a report would be brought to the next meeting of Full Council on 21 February 2019 on proposed Terms of Reference for the petitions.

#### **59 CABINET**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet 12 November 2018 be received, and the recommendations as set out at minute number 47 be approved and adopted.

#### **60 CABINET**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet 26 November 2018 be received.

#### **61 STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee on 9 October 2018 be received.

#### **62 LICENSING COMMITTEE**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Licensing Committee on 11 October 2018 be received and that Minutes 9 (Review of Gambling Act 2005 Policy – Outcome of Consultation) and 10 (Review of Licensing Act 2003 Policy – Outcome of Consultation) be approved and adopted.

**63 PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Planning Committee on 19 September 2018 be received.

**64 AUDIT COMMITTEE**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 1 November 2018 be received, and the recommendation as set out at minute number 37 be approved and adopted.

**65 HIGH WYCOMBE TOWN COMMITTEE**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the High Wycombe Town Committee on 13 November 2018 be received.

**66 PERSONNEL & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Personnel & Development Committee held on 21 November 2018 be received, and the recommendations as set out at minute number 16 be approved and adopted.

**67 IMPROVEMENT & REVIEW COMMISSION**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Improvement & Review Commission held on 28 November 2018 be received.

**68 REGULATORY & APPEALS COMMITTEE**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Regulatory & Appeals Committee held on 4 December 2018 be received, and the recommendation as set out at minute numbers 22, 23 & 24 be approved and adopted

**69 NOTICES OF MOTION**

To consider the following Notices of Motion submitted by the deadline.

The following Notice of Motion was submitted by Councillor M Knight and seconded by Councillor Ms J Wassell.

***"This council will carry out a Community Governance Review for the unparished wards of the Wycombe District to ensure that any changes found to be necessary can be put in place at the same time as the transition to a new Unitary Authority in 2020."***

In proposing the motion, Councillor Knight noted that twice this issue had been set to be on the agenda of the Regulatory and Appeals committee, and twice it had mysteriously disappeared from the agenda without even the courtesy of an explanation to members, and the wider public, as to why this was.

He pointed out that if as councillors listening to the public who they represented they would know that this was a matter of interest and concern for those who live in High Wycombe. Those who were well rooted in their communities heard from the people that they met on a day to day basis, and knew that there was a desire to see their communities having greater oversight and more investment of time, energy and money put into them.

He thought that, as a Conservative led council, the Council would wish to listen to the advice of the Cabinet Minister, who in his statement regarding his support of a single unitary authority stated that he expected councils “to engage with their local communities about the appropriate arrangements for civic representation for towns and parishes”. What better way was there to do this than to simply set up a Community Governance Review. This was something that had been done in other areas as part of the transition to Unitary Authority as it was the right and proper way of identifying any democratic deficit, identifying the costs and benefits of different models of community governance, and ultimately giving local people a say on the final solution.

Councillor Knight indicated that he failed to see why this was remotely controversial, why it would be taken off the agenda, and why anyone in the chamber who supported the idea of listening to residents and promoting local democracy, could be against such a move.

Councillor Knight believed it was a case simply about equality. In towns and villages up and down Buckinghamshire one could see what a well-run Parish or Town Council delivered for their community. Many present were part of them. They organised events - promoted community cohesion, managed community facilities such as parish halls, looked after and enhanced the public realm and green spaces. They drew local people into engagement with local decision making and they influenced planning decisions and shaped the future of their communities.

Across Wycombe in recent years public assets had been hived off to housing associations, charities, private business... all because Wycombe District Council did not want the responsibility for them. Imagine a different scenario where these assets had been taken on by local Parish Councils – run by local residents, with financial backing from local taxation, not vulnerable to the constant need to fundraise or the whims of grant giving organisations.

Councillor Knight indicated that he had often been told that Parish Council were expensive, but from what he saw they delivered excellent value for money. It was an undisputed fact that the people of High Wycombe paid slightly less Council Tax than those residents who had a Parish or Town Council – but you only had to look across High Wycombe to see the price paid for a lack of locally focused community investment over the last 45 years since the Wycombe Urban Borough was abolished. Yes there had been the big redevelopments. But looking more closely one saw entrenched neglect across the town, and that small reduction in Council Tax had been at great cost to the community infrastructure.

Councillor Knight commended the motion and thanked Members for their support in anticipation.

Councillor Ms Wassell as seconder reserved her right to speak until later.

Councillor K Ahmed then proposed an amendment to the motion in that he proposed it be amended to his wording on the same topic of a High Wycombe Town Community Governance Review as featured in the second motion submitted as follows (seconded by Councillor R Raja):

**“In light of the Secretary of State’s decision to establish a single unitary authority covering the whole of Buckinghamshire, this Council recognises the potential implications for governance, service delivery, community cohesion and empowerment and electoral arrangements in the District and particularly for the unparished High Wycombe Town which already experiences a democratic deficit in relation to the rest of Wycombe District.**

**Therefore I call for a motion that this Council agrees to undertake a Community Governance Review for the town of High Wycombe. To include existing neighbouring Parishes, with a view to securing a structure of governance to ensure proper community engagement in the area of High Wycombe, consistent with arrangements for the remainder of the District.”**

In opening the debate Councillor Pearce expressed his support for the CGR (Community Governance Review) but also his reservations in respect in multiple parishes in the town area, he supported one solitary High Wycombe Town Council he felt such had a stronger voice.

Councillor Farmer indicated he felt a High Wycombe Town Council was well overdue, with Unitary coming, High Wycombe needed a voice.

The Leader of the Council - Councillor Ms Wood indicated that her colleagues had entrusted her as Leader, to once again affirm their long-standing and continuing commitment to keep the High Wycombe Town Committee within the heart of this Council, and not risk relinquishing it to become an expensive lower tier of government, with less capacity to act in the interests of their residents.

Ms Wood noted that the Council had covered the arguments against doing a town-wide community governance review, and the possibility of creating a new council for the town, many times. The only aspect that had changed was the decision to move to a unitary district council for the majority of Bucks.

It was disappointing that some members of this chamber were using this as an opportunity to generate baseless fear amongst residents.

Ms Wood indicated that the move to unitary presents many possibilities, but they are possibilities for financial savings, operational efficiencies, and for improving service delivery.

There were no examples of a move to unitary where these objectives had been furthered or achieved by the inclusion of a community governance review, and the creation of a new tier of local government.

Financially, a CGR would likely increase the cost of living for town residents.

Currently, High Wycombe Town residents enjoyed the lowest precept, the parish level element of their council tax bill, in the District.

Aside from financial considerations, there were also notable operational benefits to the present structure. The combined District Council and Town Committee structure ensured Councillors from Town Wards had a voice and a vote at both levels and could directly influence proceedings to the maximum benefit of their residents.

When needing support, the Town Committee could access the full breadth and depth of the skills and resources that were available here at the District Council. Any change as a result of CGR would likely mean a skills support and workload capacity reduction.

Ms Wood outlined that a community governance review at that point in time would not provide any benefit to the residents of High Wycombe Town, or indeed residents across the wider District.

Ms Wood was confident that she spoke for the majority of Members in the room when saying that she did not really understand why anyone would want to vote in favour of a process that had every chance of leading to higher taxes, reduced service, and reduced democratic authority

Councillor K Ahmed (the amendment proposer) responded indicating that any decision regarding the establishment of a town council for Wycombe sat fully with WDC, as did the management of a community governance review to investigate the potential to establish a town council. And yet WDC had consistently declined to acknowledge its responsibilities to the residents of Wycombe, attempting to defer any decision to other authorities that did not yet exist.

By committing to run a community governance review, WDC would, in the event of a decision to establish a town council, still have sufficient time to plan for town council elections at the same time as those scheduled for the new Unitary Authority in May 2020.

This would be a most efficient approach and the best use of scarce local resources. It would also ensure that the residents of High Wycombe were not obliged to endure a period of less local representation than any other town in the county. Were the opportunity of a 2020 town council election missed, it could be another 3 years before elections were held.

Due to WDC's delay in addressing this issue with any degree of commitment, High Wycombe was currently set to be the largest unparished area anywhere in the UK. The legacy of WDC would be to leave the majority of its residents with the largest democratic deficit in the country. There was still time to do the right thing by the town and the residents of High Wycombe, by calling for this community governance review.

Councillor R Raja in seconding the amendment expressed his worries that if a Town Council was not established how exactly would the advisory only Town Committee fit into the new Unitary arrangements. In comparing High Wycombe with Aylesbury and its existing Town Council precepts and electoral numbers indicated a cost for the High Wycombe Town Council of only £1 per household per week.

As per Standing Order 16.7 more than 7 members agreed to the request for a recorded vote to be taken.

The proposed amendment was then put to a recorded vote.

In accordance with subsection (7) of the Council's Standing Order 16 (voting) the voting of the Members in respect of the motion / amendment was recorded as follows:

**In favour of the motion / amendment**

Councillors: K Ahmed, M Asif, Ms A Baughan, Mrs L M Clarke OBE, R Farmer, S Graham, M Hanif, M A Hashmi, M Knight, B Pearce, R Raja and Ms J Wassell

### **Against the motion / amendment**

Councillors: Mrs J Adey, Ms S Adoh, M Appleyard, D Barnes, S Broadbent, Miss S Brown, D Carroll, A Collingwood, M Davy, R Gaffney, G Hall, M Harris, D Johncock, Mrs J Langley, N Marshall, H McCarthy, I McEnnis, Mrs C Oliver, G Peart, S Saddique, R Scott, D Shakespeare, N Teesdale, A Turner, D Watson, C Whitehead and Miss K Wood.

### **Abstentions**

Councillors: Z Ahmed, M Clarke, A Green, Mahboob Hussain, Maz Hussain, Mrs G A Jones, Mrs W Mallen, J Savage and P Turner.

In favour – 12

Against – 27

Abstentions – 9

(N.B. Councillors A Hussain and S K Raja had left the meeting before the above vote was taken).

### **The amendment was therefore lost.**

The Meeting then returned to debating the original Motion submitted by Councillor M Knight.

Councillor Ms Wassell, the seconder, pointed out that she had never seen a fully scoped out published report from officers evaluating the pros and cons of carrying out a Community Governance Review. Ms Wassell regretted that High Wycombe residents considering standing for public office had never had the career path of 'parish, district then county' available to residents elsewhere in the District. She felt the major fear of opponents to the review, was that a Town Council, if created, could fall into opposition hands.

Councillor M Knight the proposer summed up saying that if voted down he was confident a sufficient petition could be collected. In terms of the Totteridge and Micklefield petitions presented earlier that evening, signatures had been easily obtained, the High Wycombe public were on board with the idea of Parish / Town Council representation.

He asked all members to examine the consciences and felt they could not surely be comfortable with the people of High Wycombe continuing to live with the current Democratic deficit.

Again as per Standing Order 16.7 more than 7 members agreed to the request for a recorded vote to be taken.

The motion was then put to a recorded vote.

In accordance with subsection (7) of the Council's Standing Order 16 (voting) the voting of the Members in respect of the motion was recorded as follows:

**In favour of the motion**

Councillors: K Ahmed, M Asif, Ms A Baughan, Mrs L M Clarke OBE, M Clarke, R Farmer, S Graham, M Hanif, M A Hashmi, M Knight, B Pearce, R Raja and Ms J Wassell

**Against the motion**

Councillors: Mrs J Adey, Ms S Adoh, M Appleyard, D Barnes, S Broadbent, Miss S Brown, D Carroll, A Collingwood, M Davy, R Gaffney, G Hall, M Harris, D Johncock, Mrs J Langley, N Marshall, H McCarthy, I McEnnis, Mrs C Oliver, G Peart, S Saddique, R Scott, D Shakespeare, N Teesdale, A Turner, D Watson, C Whitehead and Miss K Wood.

**Abstentions**

Councillors: Z Ahmed, A Green, Mahboob Hussain, Maz Hussain, Mrs G A Jones, Mrs W Mallen, J Savage and P Turner.

In favour – 13

Against – 27

Abstentions – 8

(N.B. Councillors A Hussain and S K Raja had left the meeting before the above vote was taken).

**The motion was therefore lost.**

The following Notice of Motion was submitted by Councillor K Ahmed and seconded by Councillor S Graham.

***I move that the Council recognises the financial impact on local women affected by the transitional pension arrangements for women born in the 1950s and to note the national campaign to raise awareness about the plight of these women.***

***I raise this motion on behalf of women born in the 1950s that are affected by the transitional arrangements for changes in pensions. This is very much a national and a local issue affecting 3.9 million women in the UK which includes thousands living in Wycombe and their families. In addition, the rise in SPA has financial implications for local authorities with extra demand on their services and benefit claims. As many as 147 other councils have debated the issue and over 80 have agreed to write to the Government.***

Councillor Graham explained that he had no hesitation in seconding this motion to remove an injustice and inequality which affected a considerable number of women



across the UK and of course in Wycombe District. All the major parties had shown a lack of judgement and communication leading to this unexpected hardship to a considerable number of households. Many present had mothers or partners affected by the decision.

A Member pointed out that many suffering this injustice were women who had forsaken careers to look after families and to build homes.

Equality in the dates of pension payment was necessary but a staged adjustment to avoid the hardship of this policy would have been more appropriate.

Other Members sympathised with the affected WASPI's (Women Against State Pension Inequality) but countered that saying 'life was' at times 'unfair'. Others indicated that the far longer life expectancies of the last 20 years (particularly amongst women) made pension unsustainable from public tax payer funds.

Councillor K Ahmed the motion proposer, outlined that there had been a number of misunderstandings about the increase in women's SPA (State Pension Age). It had been said that the women affected were given 20 years' notice of this change. They weren't. Most women were officially told by the DWP as late as 2011 about their SPA being increased not once but twice.

To date, the government had not responded favourably to any of these efforts. Many women, born in the 50's, would have to rely entirely on their state pension. They had worked and contributed to this country from the age of 15 or 16 – some even earlier than that - paying tax and national insurance and believing they would have at least some small measure of financial security when they reached the age of 60.

Councillor Ahmed indicated that this wasn't a party political issue. It was a fairness and justice issue. Supporting this motion would not commit Wycombe District Council to any financial or legal liability. The Prime Minister has indicated that she wanted to put fairness at the centre of her government. He indicated that the Council could ask her to demonstrate this by implementing transition payments to help the women who were affected by this unfair increase in women's state pension age.

Thanking the members of the Wycombe WASPI Group, some of whom were in the public gallery that evening, he urged Members of the Council to show their support by unanimously voting for the motion.

Again as per Standing Order 16.7 more than 7 members agreed to the request for a recorded vote to be taken.

The motion was then put to a recorded vote.

In accordance with subsection (7) of the Council's Standing Order 16 (voting) the voting of the Members in respect of the motion was recorded as follows:

**In favour of the motion**

Councillors: K Ahmed, M Asif, Ms A Baughan, R Farmer, R Gaffney, S Graham, M Hanif, M A Hashmi, Mrs G A Jones, M Knight, B Pearce, R Raja and Ms J Wassell

**Against the motion**

Councillors: Mrs J Adey, Ms S Adoh, Z Ahmed, M Appleyard, D Barnes, S Broadbent, Miss S Brown, D Carroll, Mrs L M Clarke, M Clarke, A Collingwood, M Davy, G Hall, M Harris, Mahboob Hussain, Maz Hussain, D Johncock, Mrs J Langley, Mrs W Mallen, N Marshall, H McCarthy, I McEnnis, Mrs C Oliver, G Peart, J Savage, R Scott, D Shakespeare, N Teesdale, A Turner, D Watson, C Whitehead and Miss K Wood.

**Abstentions**

Councillors: A Green and P Turner.

In favour – 13

Against – 32

Abstentions – 2

(N.B. Councillors A Hussain, S K Raja and S Saddique had left the meeting before the above vote was taken).

**The motion was therefore lost.**

**70 QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 11.2**

There were no questions submitted under Standing Order 11.2

**71 COMMITTEE CHANGES / APPOINTMENTS**

There were no changes to Committee membership or appointments to be noted.

**72 URGENT ACTION TAKEN BY CABINET OR INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBER**

The Individual Cabinet Member Decisions as set out in the summons were noted.

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Chairman

**The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:**

- Peter Druce - Democratic Services
- John East - Interim Corporate Director
- Ian Hunt - Democratic Services Manager
- Catherine Whitehead - Head of Democratic, Legal & Policy.