

Council**Thursday, 19 October 2017, County Hall, Worcester - 10.00 am****Minutes****Present:**

Mr A A J Adams, Ms P Agar, Mr T Baker-Price, Mr R W Banks, Mr R M Bennett, Mr C J Bloore, Mr G R Brookes, Mrs J A Brunner, Mr B Clayton, Mr P Denham, Ms R L Dent, Mr N Desmond, Mrs E A Eyre, Mr A Fry, Mr S E Geraghty, Mr P Grove, Mr I D Hardiman, Mr A I Hardman, Mr P B Harrison, Mr M J Hart, Ms P A Hill, Mrs A T Hingley, Mrs L C Hodgson, Mr M E Jenkins, Mr A D Kent, Mr R C Lunn, Mr P M McDonald, Mr S M Mackay, Ms K J May, Mr P Middlebrough, Mr A P Miller, Mr J A D O'Donnell, Mrs F M Oborski, Dr K A Pollock, Mrs J A Potter, Prof J W Raine, Mr A C Roberts, Mr C Rogers, Mr J H Smith, Ms C M Stalker, Mr C B Taylor, Mr R P Tomlinson, Mrs E B Tucker, Mr P A Tuthill, Mr R M Udall, Ms R Vale and Mr T A L Wells

Available papers

The Members had before them the Agenda papers (previously circulated)

1934 Apologies and Declaration of Interests (Agenda item 1)

Apologies were received from Mr R C Adams, Mr A T Amos, Dr C Hotham, Dr A J Hopkins, Mr L C R Mallett, Mr R J Morris, Ms T L Onslow, Mrs M A Rayner, Mr A Stafford, and Ms S A Webb.

1935 Chairman's Announcements (Agenda item 2)

None.

1936 Requisitioned item of business (Agenda item 3)

The Council had before it a formal Requisition under Procedural Standing Order 4 in the names of Mr P M McDonald, Mr R M Udall, Mr R C Lunn, Ms P Agar and Ms P A Hill.

The mover and seconder of the Motion made the following points:

- The Council's finances were in disarray, with Council tax increased, reserves drawn down and charges increased. This had culminated in the Statement of Accounts not being signed off by the

external auditor within the statutory timeframe. The impact of these budgetary reductions had left the Council on the brink of being in breach of its statutory duty

- The cuts to services had impacted upon the most vulnerable members of society at a time when demand was increasing
- The Council was obsessed with privatising services at any cost. Public funds were being diverted to support private companies and their shareholders
- The Council had ignored early warning from social workers expressing concern about potential issues in Children's Services as a result of pressures within the service, and bullying was taking place
- The opposition had a duty to hold the executive to account and highlight issues of concern to the electorate, particularly major issues such as the decision to remove the Council's responsibilities for Children's social care as well as the impact of the proposed further budgetary reductions of £30m over 3 years, as the service was not safe with the controlling group
- The ability of the Council to carry out its statutory functions was an important issue that warranted the calling of an extraordinary meeting
- If the Government was not providing adequate funding to enable the Council to undertake its statutory functions, perhaps it should be invited to intervene to understand how difficult it was
- Why should the public pay more Council Tax for fewer services?.

An amendment was moved by Mrs F M Oborski and seconded by Prof J W Raine as follows:

"Council is losing confidence in the ability of the Cabinet and its Leadership to fill and retain its top management team and guarantee good quality services. Council recognises that it faces severe challenges in both budgeting and in the delivery of high standard services. Council therefore resolves to utilise the skills of all members of Council, regardless of Political Party affiliation, in order to deliver the highest possible standards of service to the residents of Worcestershire within the best available financial framework."

Those in favour of the amendment made the following comments:

- There was a concern about the impact of the recent level of turnover of senior staff at the Council, in particular the potential loss of corporate knowledge and experience
- The Council needed to better utilise the skills and expertise of all councillors to work in a cross-party way to ensure that the maximum benefit and best outcomes were achieved for the council taxpayers of the county
- A better way of working was required if the Council was to avoid issues arising that had not been anticipated. The introduction of a committee system would empower all councillors to make a meaningful impact on the political agenda
- There was a crisis in the recruitment and retention of social workers. Staff felt undermined, unwanted and unvalued.

Those against the amendment made the following comments:

- The Council had always had a considerable degree of staff turnover. In recent years, local government had tended to appoint younger managers who eventually went elsewhere to further their careers. The necessary recruitment process was being carried out to fill the vacant posts. It was a challenge to reconcile demand for services with the resources available to the Council, particularly in Children's Services. The Council had pursued a prudent and sensible Council Tax policy
- Although the committee system involved all councillors, it was slow and placed significant power with the relevant chairman
- The administration would always welcome suggestions from councillors to improve service provision and take them on board wherever appropriate
- The Council had a clear Corporate Plan and remained financially robust as the external auditor had attested
- Changes to senior management had had the positive impact of introducing fresh ideas to the Council
- Opposition members already had the opportunity to attend seminars, briefing and scrutiny panels but attendance at these meeting was often poor
- The behaviour of certain members of the opposition prevented the Council from working in

a cross-party fashion.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

Those in favour of the substantive motion made the following comments:

- The operating model of the Council had undermined the fabric of society in Worcestershire
- The Council had a recent history of failures including Babcock, Liberata and Children's Services. The Council's scrutiny function had suffered from a lack of resources to enable it to undertake its role effectively
- This motion highlighted the impact that the potential £60m budgetary reductions would have on the provision of Council services
- There was insufficient openness and sharing of information in the Council. The Council was either unaware or failed to inform members of the failings in Children's Services until it was pointed out in the Ofsted report
- Scrutiny needed to be strengthened.

Those against the substantive motion made the following comments:

- The motion and special Council was unnecessary, a waste of member and officer time and made no positive contribution to the work of the Council and wasting public money on political grandstanding. In order to arrange this meeting, a meeting of the Cabinet had had to be postponed which was due to consider some important issues
- The Council had received a clear mandate at the last elections to continue to deliver public services at an affordable cost to the taxpayer
- The Council was facing a number of challenges, particularly increased demand. This had resulted in a funding gap of £60m over the next 3 years. Detailed plans would be set out in next budget to address the shortfall. The request for the Government to intervene and takeover service provision in Worcestershire would tarnish the good name of the Council, impact on hard-working staff and undermine the role of the opposition in the Council
- Although there had been difficulties with the audit process, the bottom line had remained unchanged and the external auditor had now signed off the Accounts with an unqualified opinion. The failure

to meet the statutory deadline was a one-off event and no evidence had been found of systematic failings in the accounting processes

- The Council was putting additional resources in to address the shortcomings in Children's Services. Ofsted had reported that the Council's priority improvement plan was succinct and well-focused, and worked effectively to drive and measure progress against key targets. However the Council was not complacent and recognised the constant and many threats to vulnerable children. Vulnerable children remained a priority for the Council. This motion exposed the myth of whole council support for vulnerable children.

On a named vote the Motion was lost.

Those voting in favour were:

Ms P Agar, Mr C J Bloore, Mr P Denham, Mr A Fry, Ms P A Hill, Mr R C Lunn, Mr P M McDonald, Ms C M Stalker, Mr R M Udall (9)

Those voting against were:

Mrs A T Hingley, Mr A A J Adams, Mr T Baker-Price, Mr R W Banks, Mr R M Bennett, Mr G R Brookes, Mrs J A Brunner, Mr B Clayton, Ms R L Dent, Mr N Desmond, Mrs E A Eyre, Mr S E Geraghty, Mr P Grove, Mr I D Hardiman, Mr A I Hardman, Mr P B Harrison, Mr M J Hart, Mrs L C Hodgson, Mr A D Kent, Mr S M Mackay, Ms K J May, Mr P Middlebrough, Mr A P Miller, Mr J A D O'Donnell, Dr K A Pollock, Mrs J A Potter, Mr A C Roberts, Mr C Rogers, Mr J H Smith, Mr C B Taylor, Mr R P Tomlinson, Mr P A Tuthill, Ms R Vale. (33)

Those abstaining were:

Mr M E Jenkins, Mrs F M Oborski, Prof J W Raine, Mrs E B Tucker, Mr T A L Wells. (5)

The meeting ended at 11.20am.

Chairman