

Thursday, 22 February 2024

FOREST OF DEAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

FULL COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Full Council held in the Council Offices, Coleford on Thursday, 22 February 2024 at 6.00 pm.

Present

Chairman Councillor Di Martin

Vice Chairman Councillor Simon Phelps

Councillors James Bevan, Adrian Birch, Matt Bishop, Alison Bruce, Philip Burford, Richard Burton, Jackie Dale, Clive Elsmore, Jamie Elsmore, Nick Evans, John Francis, Jackie Fraser, Julia Gooch, Tim Gwilliam, Julie Hudson, Harry Ives, Gillian Kilmurray, Patrick Kyne, Johnathan Lane, Beth Llewellyn, Andrew McDermid, Chris McFarling, Andy Moore, Gill Moseley, Bernie O'Neill, Sid Phelps, Alan Preest, Trevor Roach, Jacob Sanders, Shaun Stammers, Mark Topping, Dave Tradgett, Mark Turner, David Wheeler, Ian Whitburn and Clayton Williams

Officers

Nigel Brinn	Chief Executive Officer
Andrew Brown	Business Manager - Democratic Services
Sarah James	Accountancy Manager
Julie Jones	Democratic Services Manager
Andrew Knott	Chief Finance (s151) Officer
Sue Robus	Democratic Services Officer
Sian Roxborough	Monitoring Officer

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

2. MINUTES

The non-exempt minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 14 December 2023 were signed as an accurate record.

Councillor Sid Phelps proposed.
Councillor Matt Bishop seconded.

Agreed by assent.

3. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Harry Ives declared an interested in item 9 due to being employees of Gloucester County Council who would be financially effected.

Councillor Alan Preest declared an interested in item 9 due to being a member of Gloucester County Council.

Councillor Nick Evans declared an interest in item 10 – annex C as the Chair of Safer Gloucester.

5. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair expressed condolences to former Councillor Bill Hobman's family, at the sad news of his passing and invited Councillors, Officers and members of the public to join her in a one-minute silence.

The Chairs Annual Civic Dinner will be held at the Speech House Hotel, Coleford on Friday 5 April 2024 at 7.00pm. Tickets are available from Democratic Services. Invitations had been handed out.

6. CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S UPDATES

The Chief Executive Officer provided a brief update to the following:

- 2 -

These minutes are subject to approval at the next meeting

Notification of Cabinet changes - confirmed by the CEO on 8 January 2024, and the Leader of the Council on 2 February 2024.

- Councillor Jackie Dale's appointment as Cabinet Member for Thriving Communities.
- Councillor Jackie Fraser remaining as the Cabinet Member for Environment but stepping down as Co-Deputy Leader.
- Councillor Adrian Birch being appointed the new Co-Deputy Leader.

Service Update – Publica Transition

- The Local Partnership paper has been shared with all staff and elected members.
- The report and ongoing work will be considered at future Cabinet and the recently established Scrutiny Panel.
- The first meeting of the Scrutiny Panel (Chaired by Councillor John Francis) is to be held on Monday 26 February 2024 to agree the Terms of Reference.

Local Authority Decarbonisation Challenge (DfT) £20,000

- Support for energy saving De-stratification fans for leisure centres.

We continue to seek funding where available.

Employee Recognition Awards - February

- Marsha Llewelyn – Waste and Climate change – Inspiration Award.
- Steve Colegate – Principal Planning Officer – Amazing Mentor Award.

Great to note the hard work and dedication of these locally based Publica team members.

7. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

8. MEMBER QUESTIONS

8.1 Councillor Harry Ives

The budget consultation showed intense opposition to increasing car parking charges. Strong opposition from residents and businesses across the Forest was expressed. Why does this budget still contain increases to car parking charges?

Response from Councillor Andy Moore, Joint Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

Thank you for your question

We listened to what residents had to say about the budget. It's true that they expressed opposition to increasing car parking charges. To be financially responsible however we need to look beyond that.

Car parking is a non-statutory provision. We're not obliged to provide car parking. Not having charged more for parking over the last 4 years has meant an estimated budget loss for FoDDC of £179K.

Forestry England, Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, Cotswold and Stroud all charge comparable or greater fees for parking than we are setting for FoDDC. North Somerset and South Gloucestershire are expanding their fees. We are in line with all reasonable comparators.

Looking at the MTFs, we note that this council is looking at a £2.830m shortfall that will need to be covered over the next five years

It is the most responsible of approaches to square up to this matter now and devise a system which will at least stop losing council money. That is what we believe we've done.

Supplementary

Aside from the 370 emails, 2 letters and a petition of objection, what more could the public have done for the Cabinet to have said they were wrong, and car parking charges shouldn't be increased?

Response from Councillor Andy Moore, Joint Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

Car parking is not a statutory provision which means the Council is not obliged to provide car parking. The Council have not increased car parking charges for four years, which has meant the Council has sustained a budget loss of £179,000. If at some future point the Council cannot run its car parks whilst at least covering its costs, it may well have to think about selling its car parking assets, which would be tragic. Any private sector car parking operator purchasing our car parks would be seeking to maximise its income and therefore very unlikely to have any consultation with residents regarding any car parking charges.

8.2 Councillor Harry Ives

What evidence is there that local businesses will not be damaged by increasing car parking charges?

Response from Councillor Andy Moore, Joint Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

Thank you for your question

Retailers and residents were keen to tell us that such damage was likely in their opinion. We've not seen any researched evidence for this however and we think it unlikely to be the case.

Retailers can be comfortably reached by customers enjoying a free first parking hour. Longer than an hour is unlikely to add much extra benefit. There are also permits available, variously valid for the day to a year. There are still car parks where no charge is made. We believe we've offered a sufficient choice of approach for the motorist and struck a good balance.

Supplementary

What is the Cabinet's message to the businesses within the Forest of Dean who feel that the Cabinet do not have the interest of small businesses or high streets at its heart?

Response from Councillor Andy Moore, Joint Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

The answer is the same as the previous supplementary question.

8.3 Councillor Harry Ives

Why did the Cabinet's original budget propose spending £195,000 on a drama group to "educate" the public about money? Does the Leader consider this a sensible use of taxpayers' money?

Response from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mark Topping

Thank you for your question.

The original draft budget included an annual growth item of £65,000 for Public Engagement, part of which (£45,000) was a one-off commission of a professional theatre company to produce a drama, focussing on council finances, priorities and spending, to be taken round community centres throughout the district as an effective way to open-up engagement with residents about these issues. Further

consideration led us to remove that element from the growth item, and to investigate more cost-effective ways of achieving that specific goal.

Supplementary

Does the Leader still believe that the community needs to be educated on financial matters?

Response from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mark Topping

There is a lot that people that need to learn about how Councils work, where the money comes from and how its spent. For instance, a lot of people would not know that the Forest of Dean only receives nine per cent of the Council Tax that is collected.

8.4 Councillor Harry Ives

Please can I be reassured that all Cabinet decisions regarding money will be 'sense-checked' by the Chief Finance Officer before being implemented?

Response from Councillor Andy Moore, Joint Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

Thank you for your question

This is provided in the budget at Annex L, p133, titled:

*STATEMENT OF THE SECTION 151 OFFICER UNDER THE
REQUIREMENTS OF
SECTION 25 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2003
ROBUSTNESS OF BUDGET ESTIMATES AND ADEQUACY OF RESERVES
2024/25*

This is obviously his statutory requirements however I meet and talk to our CFO on a daily basis to discuss everything that the Cabinet plans to ensure that I get his wise opinion and thoughts. I believe this is the same as was the case with my predecessor in this role. All Cabinet decisions are discussed with the Chief Financial Officer and financial implications are added to each Cabinet and Council report that he signs off.

I, as the finance portfolio holder, take this opportunity to thank the CFO in published writing for his guidance and wisdom in preparation of this budget and assistance since I came into post. At a time of ever narrower financial straits for local authorities and section 114 notices, our council is a model of solvency and financial good practice thanks to our CFO and his finance team.

Supplementary

Could there be reassurance that Cabinet would not do anything financially that the Chief Finance Officer disagreed with?

Response from Councillor Andy Moore, Joint Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

The Chief Finance Officer does not make political decisions so that reassurance cannot be given.

8.5 Councillor John Francis

On the 12th May 2022 the cabinet approved item 13 which was the **Statement of Common Ground** (report PH.489) which included the clause:-

'Agreements 7. The Parties agree that making provision to meet the full range of housing needs in the right places at the right time is a vital role for the Gloucestershire authorities. The parties acknowledge this may result in one local authority accommodating the identified needs of another local authority, particularly where a local authority is unable to accommodate all of the identified need and where accommodating need in a neighbouring authority represents the most sustainable form of development.'

In view of this clause accepting the principle of accommodating housing needs from another district, Tewkesbury Borough Council as part of their Gloucester and Tewkesbury Strategic Plan consultation are planning for a minimum of 4000 houses 'straddling the boundary between Tewkesbury and the Forest of Dean'.

Scenario 4

New Strategic Settlement

6.25 'minimum of around 4000 houses'

"A further potential option is presented straddling the boundary of Tewkesbury Borough and the Forest of Dean between Churcham and Highnam in the south west of the SLP area."

Can the leader explain the Council's position on this proposed option?

How is this Council progressing on the installation of Electric Vehicle Charging Points in its chargeable and free car parks?

Response from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mark Topping

Thank you for your question

Yes, this is a very important issue for the Council and a response to the consultation will be considered at Cabinet in March but in the meantime, I provide the following reply:

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) guidance (updated Dec 2023) states at paragraph 24 under the heading 'Maintaining effective cooperation' that Local planning authorities and county councils are under a duty to cooperate with each other on strategic matters that cross administrative boundaries. At paragraph 25, it further states that strategic policy-making authorities should collaborate to identify the relevant strategic matters which they need to address in their plans, and at paragraph 27 the NPPF continues by stating that in order to demonstrate effective and on-going joint working, strategic policy-making authorities should prepare and maintain statements of common ground to document the cross-boundary matters being addressed.

If we look specifically at the below extract from the Statement of Common Ground agreed on 12th May 2022:

'Agreements 7. The Parties agree that making provision to meet the full range of housing needs in the right places at the right time is a vital role for the Gloucestershire authorities. The parties acknowledge this may result in one local authority accommodating the identified needs of another local authority, particularly where a local authority is unable to accommodate all of the identified need and where accommodating need in a neighbouring authority represents the most sustainable form of development.'

The above complies with the requirements of the NPPF and is therefore correct in what it is seeking to achieve; an agreement of cross-boundary collaboration in order to produce a positively prepared and justified strategy. However, it does not commit any decision. It also applies across the County where there is a current and future requirement for the needs of Glos City and Cheltenham to be met in part in Tewkesbury BC.

In general terms, we should remain committed to bringing forward a sustainable form of development in the Local Plan, and although the approved strategy does not include a new settlement, the principle remains when accommodating our own development needs.

Scenario 4 of the Cheltenham, Gloucester & Tewkesbury Strategic Local Plan (SLP) is only one of the possible strategy options being presented by the SLP authorities and is yet to be decided upon. It uses, as an example, three new settlement proposals which do not form part of the strategy but will need to be considered along with any others. One new settlement option is the Highnam/Churcham proposal by a developer, but it is neither supported nor opposed by the SLP at this stage and is simply referred to because of the representations received. The possible Forest of

Dean District component of this draft scheme is however not supported in the forthcoming Forest of Dean District Council draft Local Plan.

Our formal consultation response to the SLP will no doubt emphasise the current direction of travel to accommodate only our own requirements within our own boundaries, and to do so without a new settlement. However, both the SLP and our own Local Plan examination will see discussions of third-party proposals possibly including a new settlement in the Highnam/Churcham area.”

Supplementary

Can there be assurance that there has been no instruction from cabinet to Officers to develop plans for a cross-border single settlement in this location?

Response from Councillor Sid Phelps, Cabinet Member for Local Plan

There are no plans for development at this location.

8.6 Councillor Alan Preest

"Following numerous and growing safety concerns, the Local Government Association has commissioned a study into rolling out powers to ban parking on pavements, which currently in England is only prohibited in London. Would the Leader support this initiative in the communities of the Forest of Dean?"

Response from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mark Topping

Thank you for your question

Pavement parking can be a real hazard and nuisance for pedestrians, residents and other motorists. I will be interested to read the Local Government Association's study when it is completed, and consider what the implications would be for the district.

Supplementary

Does the Leader think it would be appropriate to write to the LGA, asking for a definitive timeline for when this report will be ready.

Response from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mark Topping

Yes, it would be good to get a indicative timeframe.

9. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION FOR CARE LEAVERS

Councillor Andy Moore, Joint Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance presented report F.671 to consider recommendations made by Cabinet to extend the age that Care Leavers can receive a reduction in Council Tax from 21 years to 25 years.

Councillor Andy Moore proposed.
Councillor Chris McFarling seconded.

Questions

Does the eligibility criteria, which defines a care leaver as a young person who has been in care in England, mean a young care leaver from Wales who resides in the Forest of Dean would not be eligible?

The Chief Finance Officer said it would be for care leavers that reside in the Forest of Dean from England and Wales so that would be amended.

The Chair confirmed that it would be included in the substantive motion.

Debate

Councillor Julia Gooch said she was very supportive of this proposal.

Resolved, that Council:

- 1) extend the age that a care leaver can receive a reduction in their council tax from 21 years to 25 years;
- 2) include those care leavers from outside of Gloucestershire County within the offer;
- 3) approve the amended Eligibility Criteria as set out in Annex A

Voting was as follows:

For (35) Councillors Di Martin, Richard Burton, Alison Bruce, Jackie Dale, Johnathan Lane, Jackie Fraser, Beth Llewellyn, Andrew McDermid, Dave Tradgett, Trevor Roach, David Wheeler, Patrick Kyne, Jacob Sanders, Mark Turner, James Bevan, Ian Whitburn, Harry Ives, Clayton Williams, Nick Evans, Julia Gooch, Jamie Elsmore, Tim Gwilliam, Gillian Kilmurray, Gill Moseley, Julie Hudson, Philip Burford, John Francis, Shaun Stammers, Matt Bishop, Sid Phelps, Adrian Birch, Mark Topping, Andy Moore, Chris McFarling and Simon Phelps.

Abstain (1) Councillor Alan Preest.

Against (0)

Councillors Bernie O'Neill and Clive Elsmore's vote were not registered. Both votes are noted as being 'For'.

10. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX PROPOSALS FOR 2024-2025 (INCLUDING PAY POLICY STATEMENT)

Councillor Andy Moore, Joint Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance presented report F.672. The report summarised the Cabinet’s final budget proposals and Pay Policy Statement for 2024-2025. The budget projections had been prepared taking in to account the provisional local government finance settlement figures released on 18 December 2023 and additional support given on 24 January 2024.

Councillor Moore stated that after reviewing the consultation responses, and listening to comments received since the consultation period ended, the following figures will replace the figures shown in the agenda pack, as the car parking charges that were now being proposed:

	2023/2024 current	2024/2025 proposed
Charges from 1st April 2024		
Up to 1 hour	0.50	Free
Up to 2 hours	0.50	1.00
Up to 3 hours	1.00	2.00
Up to 4 hours	1.50	3.00
More than four hours	2.00	4.00
Permits		
Weekly Permit	£10.00	
Monthly Permit	£30.00	
Three Month Permit	£65.00	
Six Month Permit	£100.00	
Annual Permit	£190.00	
Overnight Permit	£50.00	

This should mean the car parks should more than break even, and any surplus would be reinvested into our car parks.

There was one further change regarding the final settlement which was received on 5 February 2024. This Council would receive an additional £9960.00, which would be added to the budget deficit reserves.

Councillor Andy Moore proposed.
Councillor Shaun Stammers seconded.

- **Councillor Bernie O’Neill proposed the following amendment:**

Car Parking charges.

The amendment which we are proposing is to replace the Cabinets' proposed tariffs laid out on page 55 by the following:-

The first 2 hours will be free of any charge in all Forest of Dean owned Car Parks, and the current fees will remain for 2-3 hours at £1.00, 3-4 hours at £1.50 and all day at £2.00 and a weekly ticket at £6.00. The previous administration had commenced a review into Car Parks and the Public toilets associated with them, and we urge the current Cabinet to review the situation throughout the coming year. During this time, we ask that the Cabinet investigates and reports on whether some spaces could be provided for the overnight stays for motor homes, as some authorities do. This is an area which the previous administration would have looked at. During the year it will be an opportunity to see just what effect these charges would have, particularly the first 2 hours free.

To remove growth items.

We propose the removal of the following Growth items, and extra Cabinet members:-

1. Policy and Strategy, Cross Border Issues, Future Generations & Health& Wellbeing Public Engagement £25,000
6. Environment, Wildlife, Heritage & Culture (inc waste & recycling & AONB designation Consultancy £22,000
9. Planning Policy, Performance, Shared Working & Climate Emergency Biodiversity Net Gain £43,980

Therefore, Remove Growth, £90,980

Remove Member allowances (3 Cabinet) £23,268

(When Council was 48 members Cabinet consisted of 6 members (12.5%) and when the Council membership was reduced to 38 the first Cabinet was 7 members and ended with 5. (13%). It currently is 8 out of 38 (21%). Whilst recognising that the Leader can set the size of Cabinet up to 10, some thought should be given to an optimum number.) Total saved £114,248.

Best Estimate for loss of income for free 2 hours - £65,063 Therefore, Move to reserves £49,185

We believe that there are opportunities to use some of the money saved above, in other ways.

One area we have looked at is the provision of cycle racks at the Council Offices. A rack of 12 places, plus 4 Electric bike charging stations can be set up for around £11,000.

Councillor Jamie Elsmore seconded.

Questions

There were no questions

Debate

Councillor Harry Ives said that the Conservative Group would be supportive of this amendment as it reflected the feedback received from the public consultation. The amendment covered all estimated losses, completely avoided the need to increase parking charges, would satisfy businesses, support the high street and strengthen the Councils reserves.

Voting was as follows:

For (9) Councillors Mark Turner, James Bevan, Harry Ives, Clayton Williams, Nick Evans, Julia Gooch, Jamie Elsmore, Tim Gwilliam, Bernie O' Neill,

Abstain (0)

Against (29) Councillors Di Martin, Richard Burton, Alison Bruce, Jackie Dale, Johnathan Lane, Jackie Fraser, Beth Llewellyn, Andrew McDermid, Dave Tradgett, Trevor Roach, David Wheeler, Patrick Kyne, Jacob Sanders, Ian Whitburn, Alan Preest, Gillian Kilmurray, Gill Moseley, Julie Hudson, Clive Elsmore, Philip Burford, John Francis, Shaun Stammers, Matt Bishop, Sid Phelps, Adrian Birch, Mark Topping, Andy Moore, Chris McFarling and Simon Phelps.

Total (38)

The amendment fell.

- **Councillor Gill Moseley proposed the following amendment:**

We propose a trial period of two hours free parking. To be reviewed in time for the next budget-setting process.

Attracting more people into our town and village centre's and to stay for longer, is key to increasing the vitality of our High Streets. A campaign to promote this as a TRIAL is essential to achieve user (resident and visitor) awareness and engagement. In summary, we propose:

- Free parking for two hours in all bays
- Incremental rises of £1 for further stays
- No change to the proposed permit charges
- Continuation of free parking for blue badge holders
- On arrival, all drivers (except blue badge holders) must collect and display a ticket, unless a permit is held or the relevant parking app is used
- The free parking period to be widely promoted as a TRIAL.
- Permits to be valid in all public FoDDC car parks.

Duration	Current	Cabinet proposal	Lib Dem proposal
Up to an hour	0.50	Free	Free
Up to two hours	0.50	1.00	Free
Up to 3 hours	1.00	2.00	1.00
Up to four hours	1.50	3.00	2.00
More than four hours	2.00	4.00	3.00
Permits			
Weekly Ticket	6.00	10.00	10.00
Monthly		30.00	30.00
3 months		65.00	65.00
6 months		100.00	100.00
12 months		190.00	190.00
Overnight (5pm to 9am)		50.00	50.00

Predicting the revenue for an increase in charges is an imperfect art. As proposers, we anticipate that by encouraging drivers to stay longer, (three or four hours), the revenue for parking charges will increase. The modelling undertaken by our CFO indicates a net cost to the council of £26,918 based on current usage. However, with the right promotion, we would expect that deficit to turn into revenue. The benefit to local businesses would also need to be considered in the equation. Fewer business means a drop in income for FoDDC through business rates and we already have too many empty shops in our high streets.

It is known that consumer behaviour changes according to cost, amongst other factors. For instance in Newent, when the charge was last raised from 20p to 50p, it caused a more than 40% decrease in driver numbers although revenue increased. This proposal seeks to offer outstanding value for money, and in doing so, to cover costs and equally importantly, support local businesses.

Councillor Gillian Kilmurray seconded.

Questions

There were no questions

Debate

There was no debate.

Voting was as follows:

For (7) Councillors Mark Turner, James Bevan, Ian Whitburn, Tim Gwilliam, Gillian Kilmurray, Gill Moseley and Julie Hudson,

Abstain (1) Councillor Bernie O'Neill.

Against (30) Councillors Di Martin, Richard Burton, Alison Bruce, Jackie Dale, Johnathan Lane, Jackie Fraser, Beth Llewellyn, Andrew McDermid, Dave Tradgett, Trevor Roach, David Wheeler, Patrick Kyne, Jacob Sanders, Harry Ives, Clayton Williams, Alan Preest, Nick Evans, Julia Gooch, Jamie Elsmore, Clive Elsmore, Philip Burford, John Francis, Shaun Stammers, Matt Bishop, Sid Phelps, Adrian Birch, Mark Topping, Andy Moore, Chris McFarling and Simon Phelps.

Total (38)

The amendment fell.

- **Councillor Philip Burford proposed the following amendment:**

That at recommendation (f) the proposed capital programme at annex D be noted but that its approval be deferred until the April meeting of Council to enable a cross-party member led review of the proposals to take place. The review to be completed by a working group of Full Council and to focus on the capital strategy and in particular the proposed borrowing elements of the strategy in relation to the overall financial position of the council.

Councillor Clive Elsmore seconded.

The Chief Executive clarified that the Budget must be considered as a whole, it cannot be separated into its component parts.

The Monitoring Officer stated that if this amendment was carried the capital budget could not be approved at this meeting and therefore would not be approved in time or the statutory deadline of 11 March 2024. The costs and risks of not setting a budget by this date were set out in the report. If the budget was approved at this meeting it cannot be revisited within six months, except through provisions and strict guidelines within the constitution regarding how and when a decision can be revisited within the six months.

The amendment was withdrawn.

- **Councillor Philip Burford proposed the following amendment:**

The Growth Proposals at annex C be modified as follows;

Items 1, 6, 7 and 9 be removed from the proposals and that items 5 and 8 be accepted but for just one year and reviewed thereafter.

And, that any surplus generated as a result be used first to support budget deficits and then transferred to the future deficits reserve.

Councillor Clive Elsmore seconded.

Questions

There were no questions.

Debate

Councillor Nick Evans said regarding growth item 5, the majority of the funding would go to the continuation of SOLACE Antisocial-Behaviour Team, which is a joint team between the district Council and the Constabulary which deals with very high risk anti-social behaviour, which has been running for a long time. These are situations that can drive a community to a distraction making it very difficult to live where they do and can ultimately lead to fatal consequences. Councillor Evans asked Councillor Burford, with this in mind to remove item 5 from having to be reviewed in a years-time.

Although Councillor Burford said that the SOLACE team had done a wonderful job and understood the value of the team, he believed that alternative funding methods could be sought in the second and third year, so would not remove item 5 from the amendment.

Voting was as follows:

For (7) Councillors Mark Turner, James Bevan, Ian Whitburn, Clive Elsmore, Philip Burford, John Francis and Simon Phelps.

Abstain (0)

Against (31) Councillors Di Martin, Richard Burton, Alison Bruce, Jackie Dale, Johnathan Lane, Jackie Fraser, Beth Llewellyn, Andrew McDermid, Dave Tradgett, Trevor Roach, David Wheeler, Patrick Kyne, Jacob Sanders, Harry Ives, Clayton Williams, Alan Preest, Nick Evans, Julia Gooch, Jamie Elsmore, Tim Gwilliam, Bernie O'Neill, Gillian Kilmurray, Gill Moseley, Julie Hudson, Shaun Stammers, Matt Bishop, Sid Phelps, Adrian Birch, Mark Topping, Andy Moore and Chris McFarling.

Total (38)

The amendment fell.

- **Councillor Philip Burford proposed the following amendment:**

The Car Park charging regime be changed amended as follows;

First 2 hours £1
Up to 3 hours £2
Up to 4 hours £3
Over 4 hours £4

Additionally, we introduce a permit system which offers all council tax registered households the option to buy one car park permit at a cost of £12 per annum which entitles them to 2 hours car parking, free at the point of use in any of the councils car parks.

The Chief Finance Officer advised allowing for one off and administration costs this option would make our car parks cost neutral or show a modest surplus.

Councillor John Francis seconded.

The Chair asked Councillor Andy Moore if he would accept the friendly amendment. Councillor Moore said he would not accept the friendly amendment.

Questions

It was queried why residents would be limited to one annual £12 permit per household?

It was thought unfair for Council taxpayers who do not use a car and who will never use the car park to have to pay for the maintenance and upkeep of car parks. Councillor Burford stated this permit scheme would cover all bases if residents who do have a car pay £1 per month to use car parks free for the first two hours. Providing each household with more than one permit could change this permit model from a break even or slightly profit-making model, to a loss-making model.

How would this be monitored?

The Chief Finance Officer said the process would need to be looked at in more detail if the amendment was carried but thought it would still involve a permit holder to get a ticket of some sort when entering the car park.

How is the proposal cost effective when Cabinet are proposing a weekly permit at the cost of £10, and an annual permit at £190, do we know how many residents pay for the weekly and annual permits at the moment and would they not opt for the £12 annual permit instead?

The Chief Finance Officer clarified that this proposal was for one permit per household, for Council Taxpayers of the Forest of Dean, to park for two hours for free in any car park.

Debate

Councillor Gill Moseley said she would be supportive of the amendment.

Voting was as follows:

For (10) Councillors Mark Turner, James Bevan, Ian Whitburn, Gillian Kilmurray, Gill Moseley, Julie Hudson, Clive Elsmore, Philip Burford, John Francis, and Simon Phelps.

Abstain (1) Councillor Julia Gooch

Against (27) Councillors Di Martin, Richard Burton, Alison Bruce, Jackie Dale, Johnathan Lane, Jackie Fraser, Beth Llewellyn, Andrew McDermid, Dave Tradgett, Trevor Roach, David Wheeler, Patrick Kyne, Jacob Sanders, Alan Preest, Harry Ives, Clayton Williams, Nick Evans, Jamie Elsmore, Tim Gwilliam, Bernie O' Neill, Shaun Stammers, Matt Bishop, Sid Phelps, Adrian Birch, Mark Topping, Andy Moore and Chris McFarling.

Total (38)

The amendment fell.

Questions (substantive proposal)

On page 55, 5.12 it says budgeted members allowance is five per cent for 2024/2025, but on page 16, 4.14 states an increase of two per cent. Is that a two per cent increase over the rest of the NTFP that isn't covered in 2024/25?

Yes.

What provisions are there in the budget should the Council need to reverse TUPE for former employees, and has this been adequately factored into the Publica Review Transformation reserve?

In the budget there is a movement of £217,000 from what was the transformation reserve to the Publica review reserve which now stands at £417,000. That is for the reverse TUPE and any external advice the Council needs to move the Publica review forward.

Why has the homeless prevention reserve been reduced from £250,000 to £8,000?

The funds received from government is being spent as allocated per the Cabinet papers that have gone through. Any new funding allocation would be anticipated in March, when central government sets the budget.

Councillor Preest asked if members were aware that the Clinical Commission Group ceased to exist in June 2022 and was replaced by Integrated Care Board (ICB) and how much dialogue had taken place?

The Chief Finance Officer said it was a clerical error as he was aware the Clinical Commission Group had been replaced by the ICB. We do engage with the ICB, they are funding roles that we have within the Council. A more detailed response regarding what they provide can be forwarded to all members.

What is the strategy to deal with the predicted deficit in the medium-term financial plan when we continue to make things worse by adding growth items every year?
It is being addressed through various initiatives and it is believed that the items identified are reasonable.

Will the first hour free car parking be for all spaces in all car parks?

Yes, but there will need to be a change in the parking order, which will be done in due course if the budget is approved.

Debate (substantive proposal)

There was a lot of debate regarding car parking charges with conflicting views on the reaction Councillors had received from their local residents during and following the consultation as to whether car parking charges should be increased or not.

The Conservative Party commented on the negative feedback received regarding the car parking charges Residents had made their feelings extremely clear and the point of us, as elected members being in this chamber is to give a voice to our residents. There is no shame or stigma in a Councillor refusing to support something because their residents object to it, and therefore would not be supporting this budget proposal.

The Green Party stated this Council leads on addressing the climate emergency in the district and was glad to see that this budget helps to mitigate a suite of complex issues. This budget goes some way to providing the resources needed, investing to save wherever possible without bankrupting the Council to achieve our goal. This is a balanced budget laying out how to make the most of shrinking resources while meeting the growing needs of the district.

The Labour Group thanked the administration for the consultation, inclusion and the adoption of a compromised position around the car parking, urging members to support a mature and aspirational budget. Financial procedures and policies are complex and it takes time to understand these documents and the arguments behind them, and urged members to support this budget.

The Progressive Independent Group said that it was sad that members made political statements for the good of their party rather than for the good of the Forest of Dean. his Council is here to serve the people of the Forest of Dean and thought the administration had not listened to the towns and business people. This is a Green Party budget, not a Forest of Dean one and the Progressive Independent Group would not be supporting this budget. (suggest all groups have a single paragraph)

The Independents stated a budget is about more than car parking charges or climate change. This is a green budget and the problem with it is that it leaves the Council at risk. It is balanced for this year, but how is it going to be balanced next year and the those after. Concerns was expressed regarding the growth items as these things should fund themselves. The Independents would not be supporting this budget.

Voting was as follows:

For (24) Councillors Di Martin, Richard Burton, Alison Bruce, Jackie Dale, Johnathan Lane, Jackie Fraser, Beth Llewellyn, Andrew McDermid, Dave Tradgett, Trevor Roach, David Wheeler, Patrick Kyne, Jacob Sanders, Mark Turner, Gillian Kilmurray, Gill Moseley, Julie Hudson, Shaun Stammers, Matt Bishop, Sid Phelps, Adrian Birch, Mark Topping, Andy Moore and Chris McFarling.

Abstain (4) Councillors Clive Elsmore, Philip Burford, John Francis and Simon Phelps.

Against (10) Councillors James Bevan, Ian Whitburn, Harry Ives, Alan Preest, Clayton Williams, Nick Evans, Julia Gooch, Jamie Elsmore, Tim Gwilliam and Bernie O'Neill.

Total (38)

**The meeting adjourned at 20.40pm.
The meeting commenced at 20.52pm.**

Councillors Clayton Williams and James Bevan left the meeting at 20.51pm.

11. COUNCIL TAX RESOLUTION 2024-2025

Councillor Andy Moore, Joint Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance presented report F.673. Following the decision by Council on its budget for 2024-2025, report F.672, this report sets out the required formal resolutions to allow Council to set it's council tax rates for 2024-2025.

The District council tax rate used in this report is that recommended to Council by the Cabinet in the Revenue Budget Report F672. This is £205.80 at Band D.

Councillor Andy Moore proposed.
Councillor David Wheeler seconded.

Questions

There were no questions.

Debate

Councillor Tim Gwilliam said that as he did not support the budget he would abstain.

Resolved, that Council;

- a) *approves the formal council tax resolution at Annex A.*

Voting was as follows:

For (28) Councillors Di Martin, Richard Burton, Alison Bruce, Jackie Dale, Johnathan Lane, Jackie Fraser, Beth Llewellyn, Andrew McDermid, Dave Tradgett, Trevor Roach, David Wheeler, Patrick Kyne, Jacob Sanders, Mark Turner, Gillian Kilmurray, Gill Moseley, Julie Hudson, Clive Elsmore, Philip Burford, John Francis, Shaun Stammers, Matt Bishop, Sid Phelps, Adrian Birch, Mark Topping, Andy Moore, Chris McFarling and Simon Phelps.

Abstain (8) Councillor Ian Whitburn, Alan Preest, Harry Ives, Nick Evans, Julia Gooch, Jamie Elsmore, Tim Gwilliam, Bernie O'Neill.

Against (0)

Total (36)

Councillor Bernie O'Neill left the meeting at 20.56pm.

12. FINANCIAL STRATEGIES AND STATEMENTS 2024/2025

Councillor Andy Moore, Joint Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance presented report F.674 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Prudential Code requires the Council to consider and approve a Capital Strategy annually in advance of the forthcoming year. Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) statutory guidance on treasury management requires separate annual Investment and Treasury Management Strategies to be considered. The Council has adopted and complies with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management and the Prudential Code ensuring best practice is maintained.

Councillor Andy Moore proposed.

Councillor Chris McFarling seconded.

Questions

Could members have an update on the Ethical Investment Policies and EV charging points?

An update on the Ethical Investments Policy will be provided at April's Full Council meeting. Information regarding EV chargers will need to be checked however Councillor Chris McFarling added that there had been a delay and was working through the procurement process which the County Council had initiated.

Was there any information about the EV charging points at the new waste depot regarding them being supplied with 100% green energy and what is the progress of the new vehicles?

The new vehicles are predicted to be delivered in July and the energy to charge them will be 100% green supply.

Motion to Suspend Standing Orders

Councillor Shaun Stammers proposed.

Councillor Matt Bishop seconded.

Agreed by majority.

Debate

There was no debate.

Resolved, that Council;

- 1. Approves all of the strategies in Annex A to E.*

Voting was as follows:

For (31) Councillors Di Martin, Richard Burton, Alison Bruce, Jackie Dale, Johnathan Lane, Jackie Fraser, Beth Llewellyn, Andrew McDermid, Dave Tradgett, Trevor Roach, David Wheeler, Patrick Kyne, Jacob Sanders, Mark Turner, Harry Ives, Ian Whitburn, Nick Evans, Gillian Kilmurray, Gill Moseley, Julie Hudson, Clive Elsmore, Philip Burford, John Francis, Shaun Stammers, Matt Bishop, Sid Phelps, Adrian Birch, Mark Topping, Andy Moore, Chris McFarling and Simon Phelps.

Abstain (4) Councillor Alan Preest, Julia Gooch, Jamie Elsmore and Tim Gwilliam.

Against (0)

Total (35)

13. **INDEPENDENT PERSON**

The Monitoring Officer presented report LD.729 to seek the approval of full Council to extend the appointment of Christopher Wood as Independent Person (IP) for Forest of Dean District Council (FODDC) for a period of 6 months.

Questions

What steps are being taken to ensure that we advertise more widely considering the apparent difficulty we have had in recruiting an independent person?

Further advice will be sought from our Human Resource team to see how we could reach a wider audience.

Debate

There was no debate.

Resolved, that Council;

- a) *approved an extension to the appointment of Christopher Wood until the 1 September 2024 as one of the Independent Persons for Forest of Dean District Council.*

Voting was as follows:

For (35) Councillors Di Martin, Richard Burton, Alison Bruce, Jackie Dale, Johnathan Lane, Jackie Fraser, Beth Llewellyn, Andrew McDermid, Dave Tradgett, Trevor Roach, David Wheeler, Patrick Kyne, Jacob Sanders, Mark Turner, Alan Preest, Harry Ives, Ian Whitburn, Nick Evans, Julia Gooch, Jamie Elsmore, Tim Gwilliam, Gillian Kilmurray, Gill Moseley, Julie Hudson, Clive Elsmore, Philip Burford, John Francis, Shaun Stammers, Matt Bishop, Sid Phelps, Adrian Birch, Mark Topping, Andy Moore, Chris McFarling and Simon Phelps.

Abstain (0)

Against (0)

Total (35)

14. **CABINET AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Councillor Mark Topping, Leader of the Council, referred to the Cabinet report in the document pack and opened the floor to questions.

There were no questions.

Councillor Philip Burford, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, referred to the Scrutiny report in the document pack and opened the floor to questions, drawing members attention to the Scrutiny plan included in the pack.

There were no questions.

15. FUTURE MEETINGS

Thursday 18 April 2024
Thursday 25 May 2024 (Annual Meeting)
Thursday 25 July 2024

16. EXEMPT BUSINESS

TO CONSIDER, AND IF SO AGREE, TO RESOLVE that under section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in schedule 12A of the said act.

Agreed by assent.

17. EXEMPT MINUTES

The exempt minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 14 December 2023 were signed as an accurate record.

Councillor Shaun Stammers proposed.
Councillor Philip Burford seconded.

Agreed by assent.

The meeting ended at 9.14 pm

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