

COUNCIL

29th November 2022

Present: **The Mayor, Councillor Gregson, in the Chair**

Councillors Agar, Ali, Allcott, Altaf, Amos, Barnes, Bayliss, Cleary, Cockeram, Cookson, Cronin, Denham, Desayrah, A. Ditta, S. Ditta, Geraghty, Hassan, Mrs L. Hodgson, S. Hodgson, Lamb, Lawrance, Lewing, Mackay, Mitchell, Piotrowski, Riaz, Roberts, Stafford, Stanley, Stephen and Udall

The Mayor's Orator, Ian Craigan, addressed the Council before commencement of the formal business of the Council.

The Council observed a minute's silence in memory of former Councillor Rob Peachey, who had recently passed away.

57 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Bisset, Laurensen and Norfolk.

58 Declarations of Interest

The following declarations of interest were made:

Councillors Altaf and Hassan – Minute 63 (Notice of Motion – Additional Licensing for Houses in Multiple Occupation) - As owners of Houses in Multiple Occupation. Councillors Altaf and Hassan left the meeting for consideration of this item.

59 Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 17th October 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

60 Mayor's Communications

Rob Peachey

The Mayor informed the Council that funeral for former City Councillor Rob Peachey would be held on 13th December at 3.15pm at Worcester Crematorium, with the wake to be held afterwards at the Guildhall.

Remembrance Sunday

The Mayor thanked all those who had attended this year's Remembrance Day service. It was especially pleasing to be able to welcome the Queen's Royal Hussars, who were granted the Freedom of the City in 2014. They had very much enjoyed being in Worcester and they hoped to return here soon.

Christmas Fayre 2022

The Mayor informed the Council that he will be attending the Opening Ceremony on Thursday, 1st December.

Knitted Christmas Tree

The Mayor informed the Council that on Thursday, 1st December he would be unveiling a special Christmas tree in the Guildhall, courtesy of the St. John's Councillors, made from knitted squares from a cross section of the community in St. John's.

The Mayor's Charity Christmas Concert

The Mayor stated that this concert by the Elgar Chorale takes place on Wednesday, 7th December at 7.30pm in the Assembly Room and tickets are available from the Tourist Information Centre or the Civic Office.

Response from King Charles III to Letter of Condolence

The Mayor informed the Council that a letter of thanks had been received from the King, expressing thanks for the condolences which had been conveyed on behalf of the Council to the King upon the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Refreshments

The Mayor invited all present to join him for refreshments in the Assembly Room following the meeting, including cake to mark his 60th birthday.

61 Public Participation

Marilyn McCarthy, Chair of the Swan Food Project, spoke to the Council in respect of Worcester Swan Sanctuary. She invited Councillors with interests in wildlife, environment, culture, history and tourism to join in exploring ways to give the Swan Sanctuary a more formal and organised identity.

Edward Kimberley spoke in support of the Notice of Motion relating to Houses in Multiple Occupation.

The Mayor thanked both speakers for their representations.

62 Questions

The Council considered the following questions submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.

Question No. 1	
Question From:	Councillor Lewing
Question To:	Councillor Stafford, Chair of Environment Committee
Question:	Since the City Council declared a biodiversity emergency in 2020, what action has been taken in Worcester to increase the number of pollinators (including bumblebees, solitary bees and honeybees), which have seen a national decline of up to 30% in recent years?
Answer:	In 2020 the wildflower programme was started with seven sites. This was doubled in 2021 due to the positive reaction it received. This year, we have worked closely with the Worcester Environmental Group to create natural wildflower meadows. This has resulted in an abundance of native wildflowers such as poppies and cornflowers as well as rarer species such as the southern marsh orchid, providing a natural habitat for

	<p>pollinators as well as supporting the broader wildlife species in the area.</p> <p>We are also working in partnership with the County Council, creating pollinator corridors along highways through reducing grass cutting, and our Allotments Officer is supporting tenants in creating wildlife areas within their allotments.</p> <p>We're also working closely with the Worcester Environmental Group and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, who will be launching a new 12 mile wildlife corridor around the city next Spring, designed to attract more butterflies, bees, birds, bats and other forms of wildlife.</p>
Supplementary Question:	What can Councillors do to boost biodiversity further within their own Wards please?
Answer:	<p>We would like to expand the number of uncut grass verges and wildflower sites next year. All Councillors are encouraged to come forward with suggestions for new locations in their Ward, so that we can continue to increase pollinator numbers. Councillors who wish to be involved in developing areas within their wards should contact Mark Baylis, who will arrange an initial site visit - I'm referring to the Mark Baylis who's got a long track record in enhancing the city, rather than Councillor Marc Bayliss.</p>
Question No. 2	
Question From:	Councillor Barnes
Question To:	Councillor Riaz, Chair of Communities Committee
Question:	<p>Councillors are hearing that there is a rise in unregulated Airbnb properties in Worcester and are concerned about the possible impact on our housing market. Does the Chair have any evidence of this and what the total number of such properties might be?</p>
Answer:	<p>The Council does not have any evidence or intelligence to suggest that there has been a rise in the use of Airbnb properties in Worcester or that Airbnbs are having a significant impact on the housing market. There is no requirement for individuals wishing to offer their homes for short term lets through Airbnb or another platform to register their property with the private sector housing team or to seek planning permission, and therefore they would not ordinarily be highlighted by the Council.</p> <p>A search of properties registering on Airbnb in Worcester indicates approximately 173 properties that are registered, of which 112 are available for sole occupation and therefore aren't shared with the owners. This figure is likely to fluctuate depending on availability and does not necessarily mean that all of those properties are otherwise vacant. However, some as owners may move out temporarily to facilitate guests, to access the property, or may be out of the City for periods of time.</p>

Supplementary Question:	That's somewhat reassuring, however like HMOs there is a possibility that some Airbnbs could become substandard, semi-permanent accommodation. So, I ask the following - could Communities Committee keep a watching brief as the sector expands?
Answer:	I'll take away Councillor Barnes' questions and discuss with Officers what options we have. As I said earlier, there isn't a requirement for Airbnbs to register at the moment, but if Members are finding that it's having a significant impact in their Wards, we'll certainly take that up through the Communities brief.
Question No. 3	
Question From:	Councillor Stephen (on behalf of Councillor Bisset)
Question To:	Councillor Stanley, Chair of Personnel and General Purposes Sub-Committee
Question:	Could the Chair of Personnel and General Purposes Sub-Committee confirm that he is happy to consult with local SEN and learning disability charities to establish how the Council can work with them to ensure that people with a learning disability living in the city are not unfairly disadvantaged by the introduction of mandatory photographic Voter IDs at the next local elections in May 2023?
Answer:	<p>From May 2023, individuals who wish to vote in person, including those acting as a proxy on behalf of another individual, will be required to produce an accepted form of photographic ID to prove their identity before they will be issued with a ballot paper. There is a wide range of acceptable IDs.</p> <p>The Electoral Commission recognises that this is a significant change and is due to begin a national publicity campaign regarding Voter ID in January of next year. The Commission is working closely with civil society organisations to produce tailored communications resources for specific audiences.</p> <p>The Returning Officer will produce a public engagement strategy to promote the new requirements for electors to vote at their polling station, taking into account the Council's recently published Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. Council officers will work with stakeholders across the city, including SEN and learning charities, to share the resources produced by the Electoral Commission to ensure all those eligible to vote are able to do so in May 2023.</p>
Supplementary Question:	I appreciate the answer that you've given, obviously there's going to be a lot of work being done to try and support people who don't have a driving licence or passport and so on. I can imagine there's going to be quite a lot of additional work for Council Officers to do this. My question is - will you work with Council officers to make sure they have got the resources and staffing necessary to make sure the changes are being done in such a way that is satisfactory to the Worcester residents?

Answer:	The short answer is yes, I'm more than happy as Chair of the Committee to work with Officers to produce outcomes we all seek in this, I acknowledge the importance of this, I know that many people will become concerned as polling day approaches. I think it's beholden on us as a Council to make sure we do everything we can to smooth the path on this, so happy to give an update as and when required.
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63 **Notice of Motion**

The Council considered the following Notices of Motion, which had been submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 8:

1. **Proposed Amendment to Council's Constitution**

The Council notes that:

1. Public participation at Full Council and in Committee meetings should offer a meaningful opportunity for residents to engage with local democracy. Residents should be able to raise questions and share their views on matters discussed by Full Council and its Committees, and they should also be entitled to receive responses to their questions.
2. The current Constitution does not guarantee that residents will receive answers to their questions and therefore residents may doubt whether the Council listens to and seriously considers their views and suggestions.
3. In order to rectify this democratic deficiency and enhance the sense of accountability of Elected Members and Council Officers, this motion proposes that:
 - a) Part 4 Council Procedure Rules, 10.3.5 is changed from 'Any question shall be directed at the Leader of the Council or the chair of the relevant committee who **may reply** orally at the meeting, or in writing following the meeting or **who may decline** to reply; or who may ask an Officer so to reply on their behalf.' to: '**The Council values opinions and welcomes questions of the public.** Should there be any questions directed at the Leader of the Council or the Chair of any Committee, **they may reply orally at the meeting, or in writing following the meeting;** or may ask an Officer so to reply on their behalf.'
 - b) Part 5 Committee Procedure Rules, 10.4.3. is changed from 'Any question shall be directed at the Chair who **may reply** orally at the meeting, or in writing following the meeting or **who may decline** to reply; or who may ask an Officer so to reply on his or her behalf.' to: '**The Council values opinions and welcomes questions of the public.** Should there be any questions directed at the Chair, **the Chair shall be obliged to reply orally at the meeting, or in writing following the meeting;** or shall ask an Officer so to reply on the Chair's behalf.'
4. Furthermore, the Council's present Constitution does not give sufficient weight and acknowledgement to the importance of petitions put forward by members of public.
5. In order to rectify this democratic deficiency and enhance the sense of accountability of Elected Members and Council Officers, this motion proposes that:

- a. Part 4 Council Procedure Rules, 10.3.4 is changed from: 'Any petition shall be received by the Mayor **without response**' to: Any petition shall be received by the **Mayor, who will be obliged to acknowledge its receipt** and will endeavour to respond in writing to its content. The Mayor may delegate the formal reply to the petition to an Officer.'
- b. Part 5 Committee Procedure Rules, 10.4.2. is changed from 'Any petition shall be received by the Chair **without response**' to: 'Any petition shall be received by the **Chair, who will be obliged to acknowledge its receipt** and will endeavour to respond in writing to its content. The Chair may delegate the formal reply to the petition to an Officer.'

The proposer, Councillor Piotrowski and the seconder, Councillor Lewing, both spoke in support of the Motion. Councillor Piotrowski explained that he wished to make a number of amendments to the Motion. Details were circulated at the meeting.

Other Members spoke on the Motion. In accordance with the rules set out in the Constitution, Councillor Udall proposed an amendment to the Motion, as follows:

That the Council refers this Motion to Audit and Governance Committee for consideration.

The proposed amendment was seconded by Councillor Roberts.

On being put to the vote the amendment was carried. Members then proceeded to vote on the Motion, as amended, and it was agreed and

RESOLVED: That the Council agree to refer this Motion to Audit and Governance Committee for consideration.

2. Voter ID

In April 2022 the Elections Act came into effect. This rules that all voters for English or UK-wide general election must show photographic identification.

Voter ID is completely unnecessary and all the evidence indicates that it is likely to particularly suppress turnout amongst disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, there is specific concerns about its rollout for local election across England in May 2023.

Election officials as quoted by The Guardian on 10th November 2022 have expressed concern that a short timetable for implementation and lack of clarity about the rules could cause thousands of people to be disfranchised.

Council therefore resolves to mandate the Managing Director to write to H.M. Government calling for a delay to the introduction of compulsory voter ID pending a review of its likely impact.

The proposer, Councillor Lamb and the seconder, Councillor Denham, both spoke in support of the Motion.

Other Members spoke on the Motion, following which the Motion was put to the vote. The Motion was agreed and it was

RESOLVED: That the Council agree to mandate the Managing Director to write to H.M. Government calling for a delay to the introduction of compulsory voter ID pending a review of its likely impact.

3. BBC Local Radio

Council recognises and values the contribution to Worcestershire life and society made by BBC local radio stations, such as BBC Hereford and Worcester.

Council views with deep concern the possible impact of the government decision to freeze and then abolish the TV Licence Fee and the consequences it could have on future funding for local radio. Use of BBC local radio is an important and vital part of the Council's ability to communicate with local residents at times of emergency or natural disaster.

Council therefore mandates the Managing Director to write to the Secretary of State calling on her to ensure and secure future funding for BBC local radio in Worcestershire.

The proposer, Councillor Lawrance and the seconder, Councillor Udall, both spoke in support of the Motion.

In accordance with the rules set out in the Constitution, Councillor Mitchell proposed an amendment to the Motion, as follows:

Council therefore mandates the Managing Director to write to the *Director General of the BBC calling on him...*

The proposed amendment was seconded by Councillor Bayliss. On being put to the vote the amendment was lost.

Other Members then spoke on the Motion, following which the Motion was put to the vote. The Motion was agreed and it was

RESOLVED: That the Council agree to mandate the Managing Director to write to the Secretary of State calling on her to ensure and secure future funding for BBC local radio in Worcestershire.

4. Additional Licensing for Houses in Multiple Occupation

In May 2020, Worcester City Council adopted rules to require additional licensing for the creation of new HMOs in five wards of the city: St John, St Clement, Bedwardine, Cathedral and Arboretum.

In the context of a recession and a cost of living crisis, where housing and living standards are likely to decline, these rules are a necessary protection against exploitation.

All wards in the city would benefit from being covered by these rules.

Therefore, Council resolves to revoke the exemptions currently in place, and instead require additional licensing for HMOs across the whole of the city, regardless of the ward they happen to be in.

The proposer, Councillor Denham and the seconder, Councillor Cookson, both spoke in support of the Motion.

In accordance with the rules set out in the Constitution, Councillor Mitchell proposed an amendment to the Motion, as follows:

That a paper is brought to Communities Committee, having full regard to introducing licensing for HMOs across the whole of the city.

The proposed amendment was seconded by Councillor Stanley. On being put to the vote the amendment was lost.

Members then spoke on the Motion, following which the Motion was put to the vote. The Motion was agreed and it was

RESOLVED: That the Council agree to revoke the exemptions currently in place, and instead require additional licensing for HMOs across the whole of the city, regardless of the ward they happen to be in.

64 Matters Relating to the Leadership of the Council

The Council considered the appointment of Joint Leaders, following the resignation of Councillor Bayliss.

It was proposed by Councillor Stanley and seconded by Councillor Geraghty that Councillor Mitchell be nominated.

There were no further nominations.

Upon being put to the vote it was agreed and

RESOLVED: That the Council agree that Councillor Mitchell be elected to the position of Joint Leader of the Council.

65 Council Response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England: Draft Recommendations for New Electoral Arrangements for Worcester City Council

The Council considered a report on the Local Government Boundary Commission's proposals "New Electoral Arrangements for Worcester City Council, Draft Recommendations, November 2022." The Commission's consultation on this document would close on 25th January 2023 and, following consultation with the Leaders of the Council's four Political Groups, a document had been produced to set out the Council's response to these draft recommendations. This response is supported by all four of the Political Group Leaders. Political Groups and individual Councillors may also submit their own comments to the Commission.

It was proposed by Councillor Denham and seconded by Councillor Mitchell, and upon being put to the vote it was unanimously agreed and

RESOLVED: That Council agree the response set out in Appendix 1 to the report as its collective response to the draft recommendations published

by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and authorises the Corporate Director - Planning and Governance to submit this document to the Commission, on behalf of the Council.

66 Report from the Relevant Committee on Matters which are Referred to Council for Decision

None.

67 Report from the Joint Leader of the Council on Any Matters Which he is of the Opinion Require Urgent Consideration by the Council

The Joint Leader stated that, in the light of his appointment, he wished to propose two amendments to membership of Committees.

Firstly, the Joint Leader is a member of the Joint Consultative and Safety Committee. He therefore proposed that he be appointed to replace Councillor Bayliss on this Committee.

Secondly he wished to tender his resignation as a member of the Planning Committee. Accordingly, the Council were invited to appoint a replacement. He proposed that Councillor Stanley be appointed to the Committee and also appointed as Chair.

Finally, the Joint Leader paid tribute to Councillor Bayliss for his service as Joint Leader.

The proposals were seconded by Councillor Bayliss. There were no other nominations. Upon being put to the vote it was agreed and

RESOLVED: That the Council approve the following appointments:

Joint Consultative and Safety Committee – Councillor Mitchell in place of Councillor Bayliss

Planning Committee – Councillor Stanley in place of Councillor Mitchell, with Councillor Stanley as Chair.

68 Any Exempt Issues

None.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00p.m. – 9.05p.m.

Chair at the meeting on
21st February 2023