

Council

Thursday, 8 October 2015

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Pattie Hill (Mayor), Councillor Joe Baker (Deputy Mayor) and Councillors Tom Baker-Price, Roger Bennett, Natalie Brookes, David Bush, Michael Chalk, Greg Chance, Anita Clayton, Brandon Clayton, Matthew Dormer, John Fisher, Andrew Fry, Bill Hartnett, Gay Hopkins, Wanda King, Jane Potter, Gareth Prosser, Mark Shurmer, Rachael Smith, Yvonne Smith, Debbie Taylor, David Thain, Jennifer Wheeler, Pat Witherspoon and Nina Wood-Ford

Officers:

Kevin Dicks, Sue Hanley, Claire Felton and Sheena Jones

Democratic Services Officer:

Amanda Scarce

51. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Juliet Brunner, Antonia Pulsford and Paul Swansborough.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

53. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 21st September 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

54. ANNOUNCEMENTS

a) The Mayor

The Mayor thanked all those who had attended her Church Service which had been held on 4th October 2015.

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Chair

b) The Leader

The Leader had attended a number of events and highlighted the following:

- The Headless Cross Apply Day
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Day
- A fund raising event at a local bank in support of the local Nightstop project.

55. PROPOSALS FOR A WEST MIDLANDS COMBINED AUTHORITY

The Leader introduced the report and in so doing highlighted to Members an additional recommendation, in respect of delegated authority to approve amended documentation, should the Council agree to accept the invitation to become a non-constituent member of the proposal West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). This took account of the fast moving and ever changing route which this matter was taking.

In response to a requested from Councillor Brandon Clayton, the Mayor announced that the meeting would be adjourned for a few minutes to allow Members to consider the additional recommendation. The meeting stood adjourned from 7.07 p.m. to 7.09 p.m.

Following the short adjournment the Leader continued his presentation of the report, making specific reference to a number of areas:

- The Council needed to make a decision on 2 very important issues which could lead to advantages to the residents and business of the Borough.
- The WMCA work was much more advanced than that in respect of the Worcestershire Devolution option and the joining of one did not preclude membership of the other.
- The results of the consultation which had been carried out – the Leader had also spoken to both residents and business leaders and discussed the matter at the Economic Development Forum.
- The complexity of the subject and the speed and pace at which the matter was moving, with the timetable being set by Central Government.
- Presentations and updates which had been received in respect of both options – it was highlighted that each had differing powers and scope with one based on a single county and the other with potentially 21 councils and 3 LEPs.
- The Leader thanked officers for their support, work and dedication on the two projects.

In respect of the WMCA option, a decision was needed in order to meet the response date and the Leader spoke in support of this option drawing Members attention to the opportunities for growth, jobs, investment and improved transport which the Borough could potentially benefit from by being a non-constituent member of the WMCA. The WMCA would be the biggest combined authority in the country with the potential for significant growth being available which would allow the Borough to raise skills levels and increase productivity. The Leader highlighted a number of points within the report and in particular made reference to the “metro mayor”, assuring Members that this role would only cover the metropolitan council areas and not the non-constituent members. In respect of the devolution option, work was on going on putting together a package and reports would continue to be received and consideration given to this in due course.

The Leader gave the Chief Executive the opportunity to provide a further update and he provided Members with details of the authorities who had already agreed to become non-constituent members together with those who were yet to make a decision. The Chief Executive also confirmed that the 3 LEPs involved were Black Country, Coventry and Warwickshire and Greater Birmingham and Solihull. He also confirmed that all involved were working together to try and give non-constituent members the ability to vote on as many issues as possible. The Chief Executive informed Members that a further meeting would be held on 9th October and further updates would be provided on a regular basis.

Following presentation of the report and the comments from the Chief Executive, Members discussed the matter in detail, with particular reference to a number of areas:

- The lack of information available currently, which had led to uncertainty around the proposals and the timetable imposed on the Council to make a decision.
- The option to become a member of both the WMCA and the Worcestershire Devolution deal.
- The lack of clear benefits to the Council from being a non-constituent member of the WMCA.
- The need to be a non-constituent member of the WMCA at the earliest possible stage in order to be able to influence any future plans.
- Concerns around the involvement of Birmingham City Council and the problems which that Council had faced in recent years.
- The uncertainties around the role of the “metro mayor” and any influence the role may have on non-constituent members.

In summing up, the Leader thanked Members for the debate and acknowledged the points and concerns which had been raised. He reiterated that the WMCA and potential Worcestershire Devolution Deal were not mutually exclusive and it was planned that the Council would continue to be represented at discussions about both initiatives. The Chief Executive would also continue to provide written updates on both options to all Councillors.

RESOLVED that

- a) **the Council accept the invitation to become a non-constituent member of the proposed West Midlands Combined Authority;**
- b) **the Council approve the Governance Review and Scheme and request that further reports are brought back to Council on governance arrangements and a devolution 'deal' for WMCA and any proposals for devolution in Worcestershire;**
- c) **authority be delegated to the Chief Executive, following consultation with the Leader of the Council, to approve amendments to the Governance Review and Scheme for the establishment of a Combine Authority for the West Midlands as long as they do not materially change the contents of the Scheme presented to the Council at this evening's meeting; and**
- d) **the Council accept the invitation to become a non-constituent member of the proposed WMCA, and approve the release of balances of £10,000 for this Council's contribution to the WMCA set up costs in the 2015/16 financial year and for the inclusion of £25,000 in the medium term financial plan for an ongoing financial contribution.**

56. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

There were no separate items of urgent business to consider at this meeting.