

# Executive Committee

11<sup>th</sup> February 2014

## MINUTES

### Present:

Councillor Bill Hartnett (Chair), Councillor Greg Chance (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Juliet Brunner, Brandon Clayton, John Fisher, Phil Mould, Mark Shurmer and Debbie Taylor

### Also Present:

Councillor Andrew Brazier

### Officers:

E Baker, R Cooke, C Flanagan, S Green, S Hanley, S Horrobin, S Morgan, J Pickering and L Tompkin

### Committee Services Officer:

I Westmore

### 125. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Rebecca Blake.

### 126. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

### 127. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader advised that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Items 5, the Medium Term Financial Plan, and 6, the Housing Revenue Account Initial Estimates / Rent Setting 2014/15, were included in an Additional Papers pack.

The Leader expressed sympathy to all those in Worcestershire and other parts of the country who were suffering from the recent flooding and also his gratitude to workers in local government, the emergency services and the Environment Agency who were doing what they could to assist.

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Chair

Finally, the Leader wished to place on record the gratitude of the Council to Sue Horrobin, Environmental Services Manager, who was leaving the authority after more than a quarter of century of loyal and dedicated service to take up a new post in Scotland.

## 128. MINUTES

### **RESOLVED that**

**the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.**

## 129. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Committee considered a report which set out the financial position for the revenue budget for 2014/15. Given the difficult financial situation in which this and other Councils found themselves, Officers were presenting a one year budget at this stage. A further report would be submitted to the Committee in September / October 2014 which would look ahead to the 2015/16 and 2016/17 financial years.

Officers highlighted the decrease in central Government funding over recent years which was, in part, being masked by the aggregation of specific grants into the overall financial settlement. Alongside this reduction in the Revenue Support Grant there were a number of other unavoidable budget pressures with which the Council was having to contend, such as pensions costs, reductions in funding from the County Council and reductions in specific revenue streams such as the Department of Work and Pensions administration subsidy. The Council was only being asked to consider a single revenue bid, that for the Eastern Gateway, which it was anticipated would result in economic development opportunities.

A number of measures had been undertaken to reduce the projected shortfall, including the redesign of a number of service areas, an increase in income through services such as CCTV and Lifeline and a proposed 1.9% increase in Council Tax for the coming year - there remained a small outstanding shortfall but Officers intended to address this prior to the next meeting of the Committee.

The Leader advised that he had written to the Government concerning the poor Financial Settlement as agreed at the previous meeting and thanked Jayne Pickering, Section 151 Officer, Sam Morgan, Deputy Section 151 Officer, and the Financial Services

Team for their hard work in developing the current budget proposals under difficult circumstances.

Concern was expressed that specific accumulated reserves were being used to meet the current deficit with the result that the Borough would be left in a far from ideal financial situation for ensuing years and administrations. The Eastern Gateway bid was also discussed, with the use of consultants being contrasted with a previous decision to remove a budget heading for consultants. Officers confirmed that expenditure for the use of consultants was presently being met through savings on vacant posts or through budgets already available to support transformational activity.

The Committee considered the comments upon the Medium Term Financial Plan from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and

**RESOLVED that**

**the current position for 2014/15 be noted and Officers be requested to review the savings that can be delivered to achieve a balanced budget.**

**130. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT INITIAL ESTIMATES / RENT SETTING 2014/15**

Members considered the Initial Estimates for the Housing Revenue Account for 2014/15 and the proposed dwelling rents for 2014/15.

Officers explained that the Council was at its borrowing limit in respect of the Housing Revenue Account and that this coming year represented the final year of the rent restructuring regime. Members noted that the provision for bad and doubtful debt had doubled for the coming year to reflect concerns over the introduction of Universal Credit. In addition, the point was made that the Council's rents still represented very good value for money, given the comparative levels of rent charged by other providers and the quality of accommodation provided.

**RECOMMENDED that**

- 1) the draft 2014/2015 Estimates for the Housing Revenue Account attached to the report at Appendix A, be approved;**
- 2) the actual average rent increase for 2014/2015 be 5.13% (3.2% RPI plus 1.93% due to rent restructuring); and**

- 3) **that £3.5m be transferred to a reserve as a Revenue Contribution to Capital to fund the future Capital Programme and repay borrowing.**

## **131. FEES AND CHARGES**

The Committee considered a report setting out the proposed Fees and Charges for the Council's chargeable services for 2014/15. Officers reported that an overall 3% increase in fees and charges would be achieved through approval of the proposals and the income target for the year had been increased by £91K when compared to the previous year.

Officers highlighted that the fifth row on Page 51 of the Executive Committee report should have read 'Bulky Collection – four items or more'. It was also explained that percentage increases had not been incorporated for all charges for practical and presentational reasons. In several instances, larger than 3% increases were attributed to charges not being increased for a number of years and the practical implications of amending printed scales of charges on an annual basis where the volume of transactions did not warrant it.

### **RECOMMENDED that**

- 1) **the fees and charges for 2014/15 as set out in Appendix 1- 9 to the report be approved; other than in cases where:-**
  - a) **fees or charges are statutory,**
  - b) **fees and charges are set externally, or**
  - c) **other Council- approved circumstances apply.**
- 2) **the Head of Leisure and Cultural Services has delegation to alter the Leisure fees and charges by a variation of up to 30%**

## **132. INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WORCESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCILS - ANNUAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2014/15**

The Committee received the latest report and recommendations from the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) in respect of the level of allowances to be paid to members of Redditch Borough Council for 2014/15.

The IRP had not proposed an increase in its recommended level of allowances for the coming year, but it was noted that the Council

had agreed a considerably lower level of allowances for 2013/14 than the IRP had recommended. The comparative figures for what was being recommended and what was being received by members was set out in the Appendix to the IRP report.

Members once again expressed their disquiet at having to make a decision on their own levels of remuneration.

**RECOMMENDED that**

- 1) **the Council has regard to the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel;**
- 2) **the Council does not accept the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel, set out in detail in Appendix 1 to its report, for the following allowances:**
  - Basic**
  - Leader**
  - Deputy Leader**
  - Portfolio Holders**
  - Executive Members without Portfolio**
  - Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee**
  - Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee**
  - Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Task Groups**
  - Chair of Audit and Governance Committee**
  - Chair of Planning Committee**
  - Chair of Licensing Committee**
  - Chair of Standards Committee**
  - Political Group Leaders;**
- 3) **the Council accepts the Panel's recommendations for travel, subsistence and dependent carers allowances;**
- 4) **for 2014-15, the Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances continue at the level set for 2013-14, as set out in detail in the final column in appendix 1 to the Panel's report;**
- 5) **the Panel's recommendation relating to the Parish Council be noted.**

**133. REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL RESPONSE TO BIRMINGHAM DEVELOPMENT PLAN PRE-SUBMISSION CONSULTATION**

The Committee considered a request to approve a response from Redditch Borough Council to the Birmingham Development Plan (BDP) Pre-Submission Draft. The response was required by 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2014.

Members noted that the matter had previously been considered by the Planning Advisory Panel but that there was little detail of any potential impact on the Borough contained within the Plan on which to base a meaningful response.

**RECOMMENDED that**

**the Redditch Borough Council response (attached at Appendix 1 to the report) to the BDP Pre-Submission Draft be approved to be sent to Birmingham City Council.**

**134. POLICY FOR SECURING REPAYMENT OF DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS AND LIFETIME LOANS**

The Committee considered a report which set out a proposal for reviewing the process for securing Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and Home Repair Assistance Loans (Lifetime Loans) paid to residents for works or adaptations to their homes.

Officers explained that the present system, which was unduly onerous for customers and Officers, had been adopted in 2009 as a result of a recommendation in an internal audit report. Officers were now recommending that the registration of any charge on the Local Land Charges Register was a more than adequate means of securing the Council's financial position.

**RECOMMENDED that**

**repayment of Disabled Facilities Grants and Home Repair Assistance Lifetime Loans should be secured by means of registration on the Local Land Charges Register.**

**135. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Committee received the minutes of a recent meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**RESOLVED that**

**the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2014 be received and noted.**

**136. WORCESTERSHIRE SHARED SERVICES JOINT COMMITTEE**

The Committee received the minutes of the most recent meeting of the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee.

**RESOLVED that**

**the minutes of the meeting of the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee held on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2013 be received and noted.**

**137. MINUTES / REFERRALS - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, EXECUTIVE PANELS ETC.**

There were no minutes or referrals under this item.

**138. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT**

The regular update on the activity of the Council's Advisory panels and similar bodies was considered by the Committee.

It was noted that the Grants Assessment Panel was meeting at present and would be reporting its recommendations on the allocation of grants to the next meeting of the Committee in March.

**139. ACTION MONITORING**

The Committee's Action Monitoring report was considered by Members. Councillor Brandon Clayton confirmed that Officers had dealt with both the queries he had raised and which were included. Councillor Juliet Brunner noted that the action from November referring to the cost of a meeting had been removed from the list although the information had not, as yet, been forthcoming. She had discussed the matter with Officers and had been informed that the matter was in hand and the information was in the process of being compiled.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm  
and closed at 8.17 pm

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Chair