

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Gareth Prosser (Mayor), Councillor Julian Grubb (Deputy Mayor) and Councillors Salman Akbar, Joe Baker, Tom Baker-Price, Roger Bennett, Joanne Beecham, Juliet Brunner, Michael Chalk, Debbie Chance, Greg Chance, Brandon Clayton, Matthew Dormer, John Fisher, Peter Fleming, Bill Hartnett, Ann Isherwood, Anthony Lovell, Mike Rouse, Mark Shurmer, David Thain, Craig Warhurst and Jennifer Wheeler

Officers:

Kevin Dicks, Claire Felton and Jayne Pickering

Guests:

Ms Sharon Harvey

Senior Democratic Services Officers:

Jess Bayley and Amanda Scarce

28. WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all those present to the meeting and explained how the virtual Committee meeting would proceed.

29. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Andrew Fry, Pattie Hill, Wanda King, Gemma Monaco, Nyear Nazir and Yvonne Smith.

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Michael Chalk and Salman Akbar advised in relation to Minute Item No. 35 – Executive Committee – Amenity Standards Document for Privately Rented Properties in Redditch - that they were both landlords for properties in the private rented sector in Redditch. However, as neither Councillor was the landlord for any Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) it was noted that they did not

.....
Chair

have a disclosable pecuniary interest in the item, as the policy related only to HMOs.

31. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the Council meeting held on Monday, 20th July 2020 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Mayor.

32. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following announcements were made during the meeting:

a) The Mayor's Announcements

In addition to the list of civic engagements which had been recorded in the agenda for the meeting, the Mayor advised that there had been two further engagements since the previous meeting of Council:

- The Deputy Mayor had attended the VJ Day Commemoration at Plymouth Road on 15th August 2020 when he had laid a wreath.
- The Mayor had opened a coffee bar on Church Green East on 14th September 2020.

During consideration of this item the Mayor praised the hard work of local teachers in respect of both preparation for and the return to work from September. Children had returned to school and many were in new classes, including some in new schools, and they had been provided with excellent support in terms of settling back into school despite the challenges presented by Covid-19. Councillors Matthew Dormer and Bill Hartnett, as the political party group leaders, reiterated their support and admiration for teachers returning to school and welcomed the work of all staff employed by schools, including teaching assistants and cleaners.

b) The Leader's Announcements

The Leader explained that he had attended meetings of the following boards since the previous meeting of the Council:

- The West Midlands Combined Authority's (WMCA's) Board
- The WMCA's Housing and Land Delivery Group

- A Task Group meeting organised by the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP)
- The Worcestershire Local Engagement Board
- The Redditch Town's Fund Board

c) Chief Executive's Announcements

The Chief Executive confirmed that he did not have any announcements to make on this occasion.

33. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 9)

Two questions were submitted for consideration in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.

Housing Provision

Councillor Joe Baker asked the Leader the following question:

“What assessment has the Council Housing Department made of the potential number of evictions from the private rented sector as a result of rent arrears due to Covid-19, and the likely impact on emergency housing provision in Redditch?”

The Leader referred the question to the relevant Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement, Councillor Craig Warhurst, to answer.

Councillor Warhurst provided the following answer:

“Thank you for raising this important issue, Councillor Baker. As Members will be aware the government introduced various measures at the beginning of the pandemic for homeowners and tenants which helped minimise homelessness and it's important that we remain focussed on keeping people in their homes so that all this good work is not undone.

Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing how many private renters in Redditch have accrued rent arrears as a result of the pandemic, and of course the cessation of the furlough arrangements may also influence this situation in the future.

Although we can't predict the number of evictions that might be coming, what we can do is to prepare to help tenants in difficulty. We do know that there are around 4000 households renting privately in Redditch and we also know from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) that claims for Universal Credit so there is every need to plan ahead.

As a result I can advise members that we have devised a communications plan ready for launching that will use local media outlets and our own social media platforms to provide information and help for anyone in housing difficulty as a result of the pandemic.

Furthermore, work is also taking place to explore the potential for us to use some of the homelessness grants provided by central government to create a homelessness prevention fund geared towards supporting households affected by the pandemic.

I think we should acknowledge that any rise in homelessness will certainly impact on emergency housing provision. Any increase in demand has to be catered for and it is a risk faced by councils nationwide. From this perspective I should mention that the officers who deal with temporary accommodation have been meeting weekly during the last few months to monitor usage and to ensure a steady through-flow into a more settled outcome for residents. This approach has worked well to date and the demand on emergency housing has remained stable.

So to summarise, although we cannot say how many people may present with housing issues going forwards, we can say we have planned for an increase in demand and will do our best to provide help for local households in difficulty should they need it in due course.

from 5517 in March 2020 to just over 10,000 in August.”

Councillor Baker asked the following supplementary question:

“What will happen to the homeless people staying in the Blue Inn?”

The Leader advised that a response would be provided to this supplementary question in writing.

Town's Fund

Ms Sharon Harvey asked the Leader the following question:

“What measures have been put in place by Redditch Borough Council to work with its community in an agreed schedule of public engagements and roadshows in order to develop the Town fund plan before it is submitted at the end of January 2021?”

The Leader provided the following response to this question:

“The Redditch Town Deal Board and officers are in the process of putting together a stakeholder engagement plan which will include a series of measures to liaise with the general public and all relevant stakeholders. Details of these events will be published on the

Redditch Borough Council website so please look here for any updates alternatively email.lyndsey.berry@nwedr.org.uk”

Ms Harvey asked the following supplementary question:

“The information on Redditch Borough Council’s website cannot be found using the search facility and it is only available to view in the corporate section of the website. We have been advised that a clear vision will emerge for the use of the Town’s Fund. When will this vision be clarified?”

The Leader explained that the Covid-19 pandemic had caused delays in a number of areas. A full written answer to the supplementary question would be provided outside the meeting and the Leader noted that he would also be available to discuss the matter further if required.

34. MOTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 11)

There were no Motions on Notice on this occasion.

35. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Members considered recommendations from the meetings of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday 4th August and Tuesday 8th September.

Amenity Standards Document for Privately Rented Properties in Redditch

Members discussed the report and in so doing commented that under the terms of the policy licences would be issued to landlords managing HMOs. Those landlords would be expected to maintain at least minimum standards, as detailed in the document. There were 80 HMOs in Redditch, so this was a significant form of housing for people in the private rented sector in the Borough. In the updated policy the definition of some key areas, such as the minimum bedroom size, had been clarified and many elements had been updated in line with best practice, including the fire safety standards.

During consideration of this item reference was made to changes to housing benefits and the impact that this could have on demand for accommodation in HMOs. Concerns were raised that HMOs housing five or fewer residents would not require a licence though it was noted that the Council had the discretion to update the policy at a later date to take into account these properties. Members highlighted the need for the content of the policy to be communicated to both landlords and tenants so that both understood the minimum standards required as well as their respective rights. There was general consensus that the majority of

landlords in Redditch were very good but Members acknowledged that there were some rogue landlords and if they did not comply with the requirements set out in the policy the Council could take action against those individuals.

Creation of a Joint Worcestershire and Herefordshire Waste Partnership Strategy Officer

The report focused on the potential for a new officer post to be introduced which would involve the employment of an officer to co-ordinate responses to Government legislation on behalf of six district Councils in Worcestershire and the unitary authority in Herefordshire.

Members discussed the following points in relation to this report:

- The Government had consulted on proposed changes to Environmental Service provision at a local level, which had included the potential to introduce a food waste collection service.
- Concerns were raised that the introduction of a food waste collection service could contribute to an increase in financial costs to the Council as well as in the number of bins provided to each household.
- The Government's proposals were at the consultation stage and no final decisions had yet been taken. Any legislation requiring changes to Council services would be the subject of a further report to Council.
- There would be the potential loss of income for the Council should the authority no longer be able to charge for garden waste collection services, which was an idea that had been discussed by the Government.
- The changes to recycling services would help to ensure that there was a standard approach across the country.
- The Council would need to issue effective communications about any changes to waste and recycling services to ensure compliance.
- The impact of any changes on local measures to address climate change needed to be considered.

Financial Outturn Report 2019/20 and Reserves

Members were advised that during the Executive Committee meeting 12 proposals had been agreed on this subject. Since the meeting on 4th August 2020, however, new information had emerged in respect of the Council's reserves. Based on this information, an alteration had been proposed to the wording of the second recommendation that had been made by the Executive Committee. This amendment was proposed for Members' consideration.

During consideration of this item Members noted that additional funding was requested for a new IT system for Environmental Services. On the one hand it was noted that the financial costs of this system had increased when compared to the original figure that had been anticipated. On the other hand, it was noted that a new IT system would help to enhance the efficiency of Council services.

Recovery and Restoration Plan:

The content of the Recovery and Restoration Plan was discussed and Members noted that this plan needed to be prepared in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, Officers had taken the opportunity to update Members in this report on the progress that had been made in addressing the points that had been raised in the Corporate Peer Challenge.

Members noted that the Covid-19 pandemic had had a serious impact nationally. People needed to observe social distancing and other requirements set out by the Government in order to avoid a new national lockdown. The pandemic had had particular implications for people who were homeless, with temporary accommodation having been provided. Members noted that the Councils in Worcestershire were working on a bid in respect of accommodation in the county and the outcomes of this bid could potentially have a further positive impact on the position of rough sleepers.

The process for developing the Restoration and Recovery Plan was briefly discussed. Members noted that all Councils had to write this type of plan. In Redditch, there would be a particular focus on the skills agenda to ensure that residents had the skills needed by local employers. The pandemic had impacted on leisure facilities and parks and open spaces, as fewer customers had been able to participate in organised activities indoors during the lockdown but there had been an increase in visitors walking in the parks in the Borough.

Finance Monitoring Report Quarter 1 2020/21

Members were advised that the report took into account the impact that Covid-19 had had on the Council's budget and some adjustments had been made in response.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday, 4th August 2020 be received and all recommendations adopted subject to the following amendment to recommendation 2 in the minutes at Minute Item No. 14:**

approval of the movement of £1,261K in existing reserves;
and

- 2) the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday, 8th September 2020 be received and all recommendations adopted.

36. COMMITTEE APPOINTMENT

Members noted that Councillor Craig Warhurst would replace Councillor Joanne Beecham as a member of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee. It was confirmed that this appointment did not alter the political balance.

During consideration of this item Councillor John Fisher, in his capacity as the Chair of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee, raised concerns about the number of Executive Committee members serving on the Committee. Reference was made to the terms of reference for the Committee, which permitted Executive Committee members to serve on the Committee but excluded political party group leaders from serving either as appointed members or as substitutes. A request was made for the restrictions in respect of membership of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee to be discussed further at the following meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Party.

37. URGENT BUSINESS - RECORD OF DECISIONS

The Mayor explained that there had been two urgent decisions taken since the previous meeting of Council on 20th July 2020. These urgent decisions had focused firstly on the fees for pavement licences that would be issued to premises under the Business and Planning Act 2020. The second urgent decision concerned delegations to Officers in respect of taxi licensing applications as well as public speaking rules at meetings of the Licensing Committee.

38. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

There were no general items of urgent business for consideration on this occasion.