

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 8 September 2020

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), Councillor Mike Rouse (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Greg Chance, Brandon Clayton, Bill Hartnett, Anthony Lovell, Nyear Nazir, David Thain and Craig Warhurst

Also Present:

Officers:

Kevin Dicks, Clare Flanagan, Chris Forrester, Sue Hanley, Deb Poole, Guy Revans, David Riley and Judith Willis

Committee Services Officer:

Jess Bayley

15. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

The Leader was slightly delayed so the Vice Chair acted as Chair for the first four items on the agenda.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

17. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Members were informed that at the latest meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on Thursday, 3rd September 2020, Members had pre-scrutinised the Recovery and Restoration Plan and the Housing Strategic Improvement Plan. However, as the Committee did not propose any recommendations there were no proposals from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the Executive Committee's consideration.

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Chair

The Committee was informed that the Budget Framework Presentation, at Minute Item No. 21, had been published in a supplementary pack for the meeting. The intention was for Officers to deliver the presentation at the meeting but a copy would be available for Members, Officers and the public to refer to on the Council's website should any IT problems occur during the meeting. As the presentation had been published on the day of the meeting the Leader had agreed that paper copies of the supplementary pack did not need to be provided to Members.

18. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday, 4th August 2020 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

19. DRAFT COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

The Financial Support Manager presented the draft Council Tax Support Scheme for Members' consideration.

During the presentation of the report the following matters were highlighted:

- The Council had the ability to review and change the Council Tax Support Scheme every year.
- Any proposed changes had to be subject to consultation with both the precepting authorities and anybody else who might be impacted by the scheme.
- The existing scheme was based on Council Tax data, was quite reactive and required the majority of residents to pay at least 20 per cent of their Council Tax.
- The proposed new scheme would take into account the changing circumstances of a resident and people could claim up to 100 per cent Council Tax relief.
- The potential for residents to claim Council Tax support of up to 100 per cent would enable a number of residents to be eligible for the support that was currently only available to care leavers.
- Under the proposed scheme once a person started to claim Universal Credit the Council would be notified and adjustments could be made to the amount of Council Tax that they were charged.
- The proposed new scheme would not take housing benefit into account when calculating the income that residents received.
- The draft new scheme would also provide clearer guidelines to residents about the Council Tax Support Scheme which would

make it easier to understand how the scheme worked and how it applied to individuals.

- The proposed scheme, if approved, would result in an increase of £50,000 in costs. These costs would be shared between all the precepting authorities and Redditch Borough Council would only need to cover 13 per cent of those costs.
- The changes were being proposed in a context in which approximately £400,000 in Council Tax had not been paid by residents, including those residents who struggled to pay the 20 per cent of Council Tax currently required from those in receipt of support.
- As the proposals were subject to consultation there was the possibility that changes would be made prior to a decision being taken on the future scheme. Any changes as well as the final scheme would be reported for the consideration of the Executive Committee in due course.

RESOLVED that

the Council should consult with the public and major precepting authorities on the introduction of a new income banded Council Tax Support Scheme for working age applicants to be implemented from 1st April 2021.

20. RECOVERY AND RESTORATION PLAN

The Head of Business Transformation, Organisational Development and Digital Strategy presented the Council's Recovery and Restoration Plan and in so doing highlighted the following points for Members' consideration:

- The purpose of the report was to provide the Council with a recovery plan, which needed to be developed whilst the Covid-19 pandemic was still in place.
- The local and national economies had both been impacted by Covid-19. To address this at a local level, an Economic Recovery Framework was in the process of being developed for Redditch and this would support the Worcestershire Economic Recovery Plan that was being developed at the County level.
- The lessons that had already been learned in responding to Covid-19 locally had been taken into account when developing the Council's Restoration and Recovery Plan. The recommendations arising from the Corporate Peer Challenge had also been considered in developing the plan.
- The Council Plan would need to be reviewed in response to the pandemic to ensure that proposed action met the emerging needs of the local community.

After the report had been presented Members discussed a number of points in detail:

- The need for the Council to be able to act swiftly and appropriately in response to issues arising from the pandemic as and where this occurred. Officers were advised that it would be helpful for Members to be kept informed of major issues as they occurred.
- The potential for the Council to focus on a small number of key priorities. Officers explained that the key priorities would be to prepare for a second wave of Covid-19 in case this should occur and to ensure services could meet the community's needs in this scenario, to work in partnership with other agencies, including businesses, to support the local economy, to review the Council's future operating model and to ensure support was available to the most vulnerable in the community.
- The work that had already been undertaken by the Council in response to the recommendations set out in the Corporate Peer Challenge and the impact that Covid-19 had had on progress with this work.
- The potential impact that the end of the furlough scheme in October 2020 might have on unemployment levels in the Borough and the action that could be taken by the Council and partner organisations to address this locally.
- The potential for documentation to be provided for Members' consideration which set out the scale of the task ahead in terms of local recovery following the pandemic and the potential financial costs involved.
- The progress that had been made with developing the action plan for the Redditch Business Improvement District (BID) and the potential for this plan to be shared with Members.
- The extent to which all relevant businesses were contributing to the levy for the Redditch BID.
- The valuable services provided by Dial A Ride and Shopmobility and the potential for these services to operate on a cost neutral basis during the pandemic.
- The support available to Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations and the contribution that these organisations had made in respect of providing support to vulnerable communities during the pandemic.
- The recent closure of the Redditch Boxing Club and the support available to VCS groups that were struggling. It was noted that the Council could be contacted by any VCS groups to discuss the support available locally, including from other organisations that provided grants.
- The potential for the Council to deliver on the aims detailed in the plan and the resources available to the authority.

- The availability of Government funding for local government to enable Councils to support communities during the pandemic.
- The action that had been taken by the Housing Department during the lockdown to provide support to Council tenants.
- The investment that had been made in new ICT systems for the Council and the impact that this would have on Council efficiency moving forward.
- The potential for the Council to work with local suppliers to aid local economic recovery, subject to procurement rules.

During consideration of this item the Chief Executive and Members commented on the hard work of Council staff during the lockdown. The Committee acknowledged that staff had had to adapt to working in new ways very quickly at the start of lockdown and had continued to ensure that crucial frontline services continued to be delivered. Council staff were thanked for their hard work during this time.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the proposed Recovery and Restoration Plan 2020-2021 be endorsed;**
- 2) the Executive Committee monitor the Council's recovery actions against the plan and that the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Leader, be authorised to make amendments to the plan as required; and**

RESOLVED that

- 3) the attached Corporate Peer Challenge Report 2020 be noted.**

21. BUDGET FRAMEWORK PRESENTATION

The Head of Financial and Customer Services delivered a presentation, a copy of which had been made available in a supplementary pack for consideration at the meeting, in respect of the Council's Budget Framework for the period 2021/22 to 2024/25.

Members were asked to note the following matters arising in this presentation:

- In 2019/20 overall there had been a £403,000 underspend in the general fund.
- A total of £1.38 million in new reserves had been created, including a new reserve for economic development growth.

- New reserves also included a reserve for service reviews of £150,000 which would help to build more flexibility into the service review process.
- There had been significant savings in Enabling Services in 2019/20, primarily due to staff savings.
- However, there had been an overspend of £486,000 in relation to the Strategic Purpose: Help me Run a Successful Business. This was largely due to a loss in revenue for Rubicon Leisure during the period of the lockdown.
- The income for Rubicon Leisure had increased in recent months. This was largely driven by growth in income from outdoor activities including outdoor theatre events and from activities at Pitcheroak Golf Course.
- Capital reserves in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) had been reduced by £3 million.
- There was a significant amount of uncertainty in relation to the position of the HRA moving forward as there had been a decline in the amount of rent that had been paid to the Council by tenants during the lockdown.
- The government had provided £13.5 million funding for business rates relief. The Council and other precepting authorities were projected to lose up to £2 million from business rates during the year.
- A loss of £1.6 million in income from Council Tax was also expected, which would impact on both the Council and other precepting authorities.
- Officers had calculated the projected budget gap for each of the years in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2021/22 to 2024/25. A significant gap was anticipated for 2024/25 as Officers were expecting that the Council would receive no income from the New Homes Bonus (NHB) that year.
- The capital programme had been significantly underspent in recent years and would be reviewed by the Council's Corporate Management Team (CMT) on an ongoing basis.
- Officers had attempted to assess budget pressures arising from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, though there was some uncertainty in relation to this as it was not known whether there would be a second outbreak locally.
- The potential for the Council to receive a one year settlement from the Government had been taken into account when considering the projections for the MTFP.

Following the presentation Members discussed a number of issues in detail:

- The purpose of the £2 million business rates reserve and the potential for this to be used to cover the projected losses in income from business rates. Officers explained that this

reserve was for another purpose and agreed to clarify this outside the meeting.

- The funding from Government available to the Council and the need for clarity moving forward about funding for local government.
- The amount of business grants relief that had been provided locally. Officers agreed to provide this information outside the meeting.
- The reduction in rent payments to the Council during the pandemic and the availability of Government funding to support the HRA. Officers explained that the Council had outlined the situation and the impact on the HRA at a recent meeting with officials representing the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).
- The services provided by Rubicon Leisure and the help that Members could provide in promoting and using these services.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

22. FINANCE MONITORING QUARTER 1 2020/21

The Head of Financial and Customer Services presented the Finance Monitoring Report for the first quarter of the 2020/21 financial year.

Members were advised that, based on the position in the first quarter, an overspend of £158,000 was anticipated by the end of the financial year. The overspend was primarily anticipated in relation to the Strategic Purpose; Run and Grow a Successful Business. This reflected the anticipated loss of income for Rubicon Leisure during the year.

The savings and income that had been secured to date had been outlined in the report. There were budget pressures arising in respect of Dial a Ride and Shopmobility services where income targets had not been met, but it was anticipated that this was mainly due to the impact of Covid-19.

There was a £211,000 underspend in the capital programme during the first quarter of the financial year. This was attributed mainly to the vehicle replacement scheme however, it was anticipated that expenditure on this scheme would be completed by the end of September 2020.

A gap of £2 million was anticipated for the HRA by the end of the year, due to a reduction in rent payments. This pressure had not been reflected in the report but would emerge in future reports to

Committee. There had been a reduction in expenditure on repairs and maintenance and management and supervision, both of which were reflected in the figures for the HRA. During the lockdown there had been restricted access to Council properties which had impacted on expenditure on repairs and maintenance. There were some vacancies in management positions within the Housing Department, which had been reflected in the HRA, but staff were being recruited so expenditure was expected to reflect budgets in future.

After the report had been presented Members discussed the following points:

- The capital expenditure anticipated for the site of the bridge at Green Lane, Studley and what this would entail. Officers agreed to provide a written assessment of the work to Members.
- The potential for the site of the bridge at Green Lane, Studley to be the focus for housing development and for affordable housing or social housing to be provided at this location.
- The financial costs involved in maintaining the bridge at Green Lane, Studley.
- The Leader's offer to other organisations to take responsibility for the bridge and the requirements of any organisation taking on this responsibility. Officers explained that any organisation assuming responsibility for the bridge would need to be able to maintain the structure in accordance with health and safety and other legal requirements.
- The potential for the capital funding generated by the sale of the site at Green Lane, Studley to be invested in social housing in the Borough.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the current financial position in relation to revenue and capital budgets for the period April 2020 – June 2020 as detailed in the report be noted; and**

RECOMMENDED that

- 2) the training budget held within the Human Resources service, is allocated to a shared service budget meaning that any training provided to our staff is beneficial to both Councils as we upskill our workforce.**

23. HOUSING / HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

The Deputy Chief Executive presented the Housing / HRA Strategic Improvement Plan Progress Report.

During the presentation of the report the following matters were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- The purpose of the report was to provide assurance to Members that action was being taken in relation to Housing Services as agreed.
- The update was being delivered in the second year of the Council's three year improvement plan for Housing Services.
- The Covid-19 pandemic had impacted on rent income and a budget gap of £2 million was projected for the HRA moving forward.
- Council tenants had also been significantly affected by the pandemic and there were financial challenges for many tenants, especially in relation to claiming Universal Credit and household finances.
- The Housing Capital programme remained in place but some projects had been postponed or had been impacted by Covid-19.
- Compliance was a key priority, particularly with respect to Housing capital projects and progress had been made.
- There was a growing pressure in relation to homelessness in the Borough. As the furlough scheme would be ending in October 2020, Officers were anticipating that homelessness would continue to be an issue in the medium and long-term.
- In introducing the new Housing Management system, the Council would be required to update a range of Housing policies and procedures. To ensure that this could be achieved in a timely manner delegated authority had been requested to enable Officers to finalise some policies and processes. Major changes to Council policies would continue to be reported to the Executive Committee and Council.

After the report had been presented Members discussed the following points in detail:

- The progress that had been achieved in the previous two and-a-half years in terms of addressing the issues that had previously been identified in the Housing Department.
- The impact that the new Housing Management IT system would have on the efficiency of the service.
- The presentation of the report for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee the previous week and the support that had been provided by scrutiny Members over the previous two years in respect of this matter.
- The hard work of staff working in Housing Services during the period.

- The potential for further information to be provided to explain how the Council had calculated that there could be a loss of £2 million income to the HRA by the end of the financial year. Officers explained that information had been provided to central Government in respect of this matter and the figure of £2 million had been identified based on weekly returns.
- The early intervention work being undertaken by Officers to help tenants ensure that rent debts did not escalate to a point where they could not be paid. The Committee was advised that payment plans could be put in place to enable tenants to pay debts in a manner that was affordable for them.
- The thirty-year business plan for the HRA and the timescales for updating this. Officers explained that this plan was due to be reviewed in 2021.
- The potential for the Government to provide the Council with additional funding for Housing and to address the gap in the HRA.
- The extent to which the Trades Unions had been consulted about changes to Housing Policies. Officers explained that the unions were not consulted about changes to every policy but instead contact was made with the unions when service reviews and other projects were proposed that would directly impact on staff.
- The potential for Members to be kept informed of any changes made by Officers to Housing policies and procedures under delegated authority. Officers confirmed that this would be possible to arrange.
- The cost to the Council of providing temporary accommodation to rough sleepers. Officers explained that £41,000 had been spent on providing temporary accommodation to homeless people, including rough sleepers, during the lockdown. Temporary accommodation had been provided in hotels and bed and breakfasts as part of this process. A number of families were in temporary accommodation and action was being taken to provide two- and three-bedroom void properties for their use. Further information would be provided to Members on this subject as it became available.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Executive Committee consider the content of the report and endorse the progress reports detailed in the Improvement Plan; and**
- 2) the Executive Committee agree that authority be delegated to the relevant Head(s) of Service for the revision/amendment and creation of new housing policies to ensure compliance with revised legislation**

and working practices/procedures, with the exception of any policy where there is a discretion or fundamental change in policy. All revisions/amendments to be undertaken following consultation with the Portfolio Holder Housing and Procurement.

24. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Officers confirmed that there were no outstanding recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee requiring consideration.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 2nd July 2020 be noted; and**
- 2) the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 30th July 2020 be noted.**

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

The Committee was advised that there were no further recommendations or referrals from other Committees requiring consideration on this occasion.

26. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

The following updates were provided in respect of the Executive Advisory Panels and other external groups:

- a) Climate Change Cross Party Working Group – Chair, Councillor Anthony Lovell

Councillor Lovell explained that he had been meeting with the Climate Change Officer to discuss various initiatives, including the potential to introduce solar panels for Council buildings and action that could be taken to ensure that the café at Morton Stanley Park had environmentally friendly features.

The survey in respect of climate change, which had been mentioned at the previous meeting, had been circulated locally and approximately 700 people had responded. It was hoped that a meeting of the Climate Change Cross Party Working Group would take place soon and the feedback in these surveys could be considered.

- b) Constitutional Review Working Party – Chair, Councillor Matthew Dormer

The Committee was informed that a meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Party was scheduled to take place on 3rd November 2020.

- c) Corporate Parenting Board – Council Representative, Councillor Nyear Nazir

Members were advised that there had been no meetings of the Board since the previous meeting of the Committee.

- d) Member Support Steering Group – Chair, Councillor Matthew Dormer

Councillor Dormer explained that a meeting of the group would take place in November and the date would be confirmed with Members shortly.

- e) Planning Advisory Panel – Chair, Councillor Matthew Dormer

The Committee was informed that a meeting of the Planning Advisory Panel was scheduled to take place on 17th September 2020.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 8.05 pm