

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 27 October 2020

MINUTES

Present:

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

Officers:

Derek Allen, Kevin Dicks, Mike Dunphy, Clare Flanagan, Chris Forrester, Sue Hanley and Ostap Paparega

Senior Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley

27. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Craig Warhurst.

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

29. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader explained that at the latest meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on Thursday, 22nd October 2020, Members had pre-scrutinised the Housing Strategy report. However, as the Committee did not propose any recommendations there were no proposals from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration at the Executive Committee meeting.

Members were asked to note that they had received paper copies of the Executive Committee agenda for the meeting in two parts due to problems that had occurred with printing the previous week. However, the Committee was advised that the full agenda could be viewed electronically on the Council's website or using the Modern.gov app.

30. MINUTES

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Chair

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday, 8th September 2020 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

31. HOUSING STRATEGY

The Housing Strategy Manager presented the Housing Strategy for the Committee's consideration. Members were advised that the strategy was designed to enable the Council to take action in relation to the local housing market. In previous years, the Council had been part of a countywide strategy which had been relatively lengthy and complex. The new strategy had been simplified and focused on housing needs in the Borough, though took into account national, regional and countywide housing pressures.

The Council was statutorily obliged to provide a homelessness strategy and this had been combined with the wider housing strategy within the document. Issues relating to homelessness, social housing, affordable housing and housing within the private rented sector had all been taken into account. Officers had also tried to clarify the potential impact of Covid-19 across the housing market, though due to the level of uncertainty about the pandemic this was difficult to assess.

Subject to the Executive Committee's approval of the policy, Officers intended to undertake a period of consultation with relevant stakeholders, including partner organisations. Any feedback received during this consultation process would be considered and the strategy might be amended in response. The outcomes of the consultation and any changes made to the strategy would be reported to the Executive Committee at a later date.

Following the presentation of the report Members debated the content and noted that there were significant pressures within the housing sector. Over the previous 30 years there had been growth in both the private rented sector and in the demand for social housing, though the supply could not always keep up with demand. It was suggested that Universal Credit was further impacting on demand for social housing as well as on the Council's rental income from Council tenants.

Members noted that the strategy referred to the provision of more appropriate housing for residents and questions were raised about what type of housing this referred to. Officers confirmed that reference was being made here to social housing and that clarification could be provided in the strategy once it was updated.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the draft Redditch Borough Council Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2020-2024 be approved for a period of public consultation to last four weeks; and**
- 2) a final version of the Housing Strategy, having considered any relevant consultation responses, be brought back to Executive Committee for approval.**

32. PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE - GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER - COUNCIL RESPONSE

The Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager presented the Council's response to the Planning for the Future Government White Paper.

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

- Officers were suggesting in the response that there was a need for further clarity about the proposals that had been made by the Government in the white paper and the implications for how planning would operate in future at the local level.
- The white paper proposed changes to the content required for Local Plans and the ways in which the plans would be developed in future.
- Whilst it generally took between six and eight years to develop a Local Plan under existing arrangements, the proposals in the white paper would require Councils to develop a new Local Plan within 30 months.
- The aim of the white paper was to make the planning system more responsive.
- Local Plans would no be made up of three zonings: growth areas, renewal areas and protection areas.
- Green belt policy would not be changing in respect of developments. However, further clarification was needed in relation to how green belt policy interacted with requirements for developments in protected areas.
- Under the terms proposed in the white paper the number of houses that would need to be developed in future in each area would be determined centrally rather than at the local level.
- The white paper also proposed that Development Plan policies for each Council would be determined at the central level rather than locally.
- There were proposals to abolish the duty to co-operate. The Council had acted on this duty in the past and clarification was

- needed about how the wider housing needs of the region would be addressed without this duty to co-operate in future.
- Officers were keen to ensure that the right to be heard at the end of the Local Plan process was not removed.
 - The white paper proposed a new arrangement for infrastructure funding. Under this proposal Section 106 funding arrangements would be replaced with a new infrastructure levy, though it was unclear how this would be set. There was a risk that if the levy was not determined locally the levy would not cover the full costs of the infrastructure works required for that development.
 - The white paper also proposed an increase in the size of developments that would trigger the requirement for affordable housing to be built as part of that development. Should this be agreed the target would be to provide affordable housing in developments of 40 or 50 houses rather than the 11 houses in the current threshold.
 - Officers would need to start working on the Local Plan as soon as possible to ensure that the Council's planning policy was compliant with future requirements. The outcomes of the initial stages of this work would be reported to Members at a meeting of the Planning Advisory Panel early in the new year.

Following the presentation of the report Members discussed a number of areas in detail:

- The meeting of the Planning Advisory Panel that had taken place the previous month which had provided Members with an opportunity to discuss the white paper in detail.
- The timeframes available for local authorities to respond to the Government in the consultation period for the white paper.
- The length of time that it took to develop a Local Plan and the benefits of having a shorter, more streamlined process.
- The potential consequences arising from housing numbers being determined at the central rather than local level.
- Media coverage of the existing planning system and delays that could occur in development. Members noted that delays could occur after planning permission had been granted because the applicant had chosen not to undertake any development work immediately.
- The valuable role of local democracy in relation to the planning process.
- The process that would be followed in order to determine whether a particular section of land should be designated as a growth area, a renewable area or a protected area.
- The benefits that would arise from using digital technology and visual maps in the planning process in the future.

- The potential for more detail to be provided about the implications of the proposals for the National Planning Policy Framework.
- The changes that had been proposed in respect of an infrastructure levy and the extent to which there was a risk that some local areas would miss out on funding if a national formula was applied to this.
- The demand in the community for social housing and the risks arising from changes to requirements for affordable housing to be built as part of smaller developments.
- The need for local planning policies and procedures to change and to be more responsive to local and national housing needs.
- The likelihood that further clarification would be provided by the Government following consideration of submissions that had been made in the national consultation process for the white paper.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) Appendix A is submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government as the Council's Response to the Planning for the Future White Paper;**
- 2) Appendix B is confirmed as the Council's response to the Changes to the Planning System consultation; and**
- 3) authority is granted to officers to begin the creation of a new Local Plan for Redditch.**

33. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2021/22 TO 2024/25 - UPDATE REPORT

The Head of Financial and Customer Services presented an update on the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2024/25 and in so doing highlighted the following for Members' consideration:

- The report set the parameters for the budget planning process.
- Two recommendations had been included in the report; the second related to the Section 24 Notice that had been issued the previous year against the Council by the external auditors and would only apply subject to the Section 24 Notice being renewed.
- In planning the budget, Officers were aiming to allocate resources to support the Council's strategic purposes.
- The Council would aim to maximise income opportunities in order to balance the budget whilst continuing to support vulnerable people.

- Any new proposals for expenditure or service reviews needed to be underpinned by robust business cases.
- Officers were aiming to develop the Council as a commercial authority.
- Key areas for review would be vacant posts, consistent underspends in service budgets, spending plans and progress with expenditure in the capital programme to ensure that this remained on track.
- The Council had been advised that it was likely that the Government funding settlement would be for the first year of the four-year plan period only.
- Covid-19 had already impacted on the Council's financial position and on demand for services.
- By the date of the meeting Officers were anticipating that the Council would be overspent by £158,000 by the end of the 2020/21 financial year.
- There was some uncertainty about the impact that the end of the furlough scheme would have locally and it was possible that an increase in demand for Council services could result in a commensurate increase in costs.
- The Council had already received £1.38 million from the Government in additional funding during the year to help address costs arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. Further financial support had been requested in respect of leisure services but there was uncertainty about the amount that might be provided.
- There was also uncertainty about the extent to which the Council could expect to receive funding through the New Homes Bonus (NHB) in the future.
- Officers were anticipating that Council Tax would increase by 2% in 2021/22 and this would be incorporated into the calculations for the budget moving forward.
- In total, over £1.7 million savings needed to be identified over the four years.

The Committee subsequently discussed the report and whilst welcoming the government settlement for 2020/21 noted that uncertainty would arise because this did not cover the entire four years. Budget planning for the Council remained challenging, though there had been particular uncertainty for local government in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The grant funding that had already been provided by the Government to support the Council during the Covid-19 pandemic was welcomed. However, Members had been in correspondence with the Government urging the need for additional funding to help support leisure services as well as Council companies such as Rubicon Leisure.

Members commented that it was important to monitor the risks to the Council as part of the budget setting process. There was

general consensus that the Council had worked hard to address the issues that had been raised by the external auditors when the Section 24 Notice was applied to the Council and Members raised hopes that this notice would be lifted.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the parameters to be used to prepare the 2021/22 budget and the framework for the Medium Term Financial Plan to 2024/25 be noted; and**
- 2) **should the Section 24 notice be continued, there should be regular reporting of the Section 24 action plan, once approved by Audit, Standards and Governance, through to the Executive Committee.**

34. BOROUGH LEVEL ECONOMIC RECOVERY FRAMEWORK

The Head of Economic Development and Regeneration for North Worcestershire presented the Borough Level Economic Recovery Framework for the Committee's consideration.

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

- The framework outlined the key interventions that were proposed to support economic recovery in the Borough in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The framework was a live document and would be updated as circumstances changed and new projects emerged.
- The framework focused on supporting people, businesses and places.
- There were three sets of data underpinning the framework which were utilised by partner organisations, including the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership and the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership.
- This data revealed that the trend was for an increase in the number of people claiming out of work benefits during the year.
- The number of job vacancies had reduced during the year so vacancies were competitive.
- There were 15,500 people in Redditch on furlough by the end of July 2020 which was 4% above the average rate in England. There was a risk that at the end of the furlough scheme some of these people would be made redundant.
- Immediate concerns were to ensure that support was provided to people who had been made redundant or were at risk of being made redundant to secure employment.

- In the medium to long-term the focus needed to be on ensuring that people had the right skills needed to secure jobs. Increasingly, this would include having the right skills to work in digital industries.
- Young people leaving education also needed to be supported to develop the right skills to ensure that they could secure employment in the future.
- The North Worcestershire Economic Development Team could support local businesses by signposting them to available grant funding that would help those businesses to continue to operate.
- Businesses could also receive support from local growth hubs in the areas supported by the Local Enterprise Partnerships.
- In both growth hub areas there had been a reported increase in demand for space for start-up companies.
- Many companies had identified opportunities to innovate during the Covid-19 pandemic and the North Worcestershire Economic Development Unit could provide support to enable businesses to do this.
- There was an ongoing priority to promote inward investment into the business sector within Redditch.
- Place making had a key role to play in local economic recovery. The regeneration of Redditch town centre could therefore play an important role in the economic recovery of the town.
- There were very ambitious plans in place for the regeneration of Redditch town centre and key partners would need to provide support through private sector investment in order to deliver on these plans.
- The report had recorded that a key decision would be required. However, Members were in fact being asked to make a non-key decision.

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

- The impact that Covid-19 had had on the local economy and the action that would need to be taken to ensure the planned recovery.
- The number of employees in Redditch who had been placed on furlough and the implications for the town should a significant proportion of these people be made redundant once the furlough scheme ended.
- The support that had already been provided by the Council to large businesses in the town, including signposting these companies to available sources of support.
- The success that the Borough had had traditionally in supporting large businesses.

- The smaller number of small and micro businesses in Redditch compared to other districts in Worcestershire and the need to support further initiatives at this scale in the future.
- The value of socially responsible companies and the potential to encourage people to establish these businesses.
- The role of Councillors as key partners in the Borough.
- The £25 million founding that had been announced for town centre regeneration and the potential for partner organisations to secure additional funding for Redditch.
- The increase in Redditch in the number of young people aged over 16 claiming out of work benefits, which had grown from 1,550 in February 2020 to 3,355 in August 2020.
- The decrease in Redditch in the number of job vacancies by 35% between March and September 2020.
- The date by which the website for the Town's Fund Board would be available to access. Officers confirmed that a response would be provided in respect of this matter outside the meeting but it was anticipated that a website would be available to access shortly.
- The Town Investment Plan and when this would be available for Members to view. Officers explained that a specialist engagement consultant had been procured to undertake consultation involving workshops, interviews and online surveys. This process would start in November 2020.
- The regeneration plans for the town centre and the date by which a masterplan would be available to view. The Committee was advised that this was at an early stage and a consortium was in the process of being appointed which would carry forward the work. A consultation process would form part of the consortium's work.
- The redevelopment of Matchborough and Winyates District Centres and the date by which plans for this redevelopment process would be available to consider. The Committee was informed that Officers had been working through the options but nothing would be confirmed until further discussion with Members.
- The form of consultation that would be undertaken with interested stakeholders for these projects. Officers explained that due to the Covid-19 pandemic consultation would inevitably need to be held online.
- The approach that would be adopted to consultation. Members were advised that the organisation that had been appointed to undertake this consultation work was highly experienced and would adopt a scientific approach.
- The composition of the Town's Fund Board and the extent to which the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) had been consulted in the Board's work. The Committee was informed that two representatives of the VCS had been appointed to the Board.

RESOLVED that

the report and the Redditch Local Economic Recovery Framework (2020-2023) be endorsed.

35. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee considered minutes from the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 26th August 2020 and Thursday, 3rd September 2020 and noted that there were no recommendations for consideration.

During consideration of this item reference was made to the e-scooter scheme in the town, which had been discussed at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in August 2020. Members noted that some teenagers had been observed using the e-scooters even though they did not have driving licences. The company that was operating the e-scooters scheme in Redditch had provided an update on action that was being taken to tackle any problems identified in the first few weeks of operation and it was agreed that this update should be shared with members of the Executive Committee.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 26th August 2020 be noted; and**
- 2) the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 3rd September 2020 be noted.**

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

The Executive Committee was advised that there were no additional minutes or referrals from any Committees for consideration on this occasion.

37. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORTS

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 a meeting of the group was scheduled to take place on Wednesday, 4th November 2020. Every Member had been invited to attend this meeting as a briefing was due to be delivered in respect of energy advice which would be of interest to all Members.

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

Councillor Dormer advised that a meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Party was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 3rd November 2020.

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

Councillor Nazir confirmed that a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 19th November 2020.

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

Councillor Dormer advised that a meeting of the Member Support Steering Group was due to take place on Thursday, 19th November 2020.

e) Planning Advisory Panel – Chair, Councillor Matthew Dormer

The Committee was advised that no meetings of the Planning Advisory Panel were scheduled to take place.

The Meeting commenced at 6.31 pm
and closed at 7.51 pm