

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

Officers:

Matthew Bough, Kevin Dicks, Clare Flanagan, Chris Forrester, Kate Goldey, Sue Hanley, David Riley and Darren Whitney

Senior Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley Democratic Services

51. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Brandon Clayton and Bill Hartnett declared other disclosable interests in respect of Minute Item No. 57 – Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and Homelessness Reduction Grant 2021/22. These declarations were made because it was proposed that Fry Accord, which was part of the Accord Housing Group, should receive some grant funding. The Committee was advised that both Councillor Clayton and Councillor Hartnett had been appointed to Redditch Co-operative Homes, which was part of the Accord Group, by Council. Members were advised that neither Councillor had any involvement with Fry Accord, although it was also part of the Accord Group. Therefore, they remained in the meeting to participate in the debate and vote for this item.

53. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader explained that, in respect of Minute Item No. 57 – Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and Homelessness Reduction Grant 2021 – the Budget Scrutiny Working Group had pre-scrutinised the report at a meeting held on 5th January 2021. However, as no recommendations had been made on the subject there were no referrals from the group for Members' consideration.

During consideration of the Leader's Announcements Members were reminded that there was due to be an extra meeting of the Executive Committee on Tuesday, 19th January 2021. During this meeting Members would have an opportunity to consider the Redditch Town's Deal Investment Plan.

54. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

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

55. INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL REPORT 2021/22

The Electoral Services Manager presented the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP's) report in respect of Members' allowances for 2021/22. The Committee was informed that the IRP reported on an annual basis regarding Members' allowances for the following financial year. Council needed to give due regard to the IRP's proposals, though was not obliged to approve the recommendations detailed within the report.

Members discussed the report and in so doing noted that the report was being considered at a time when many residents were being made redundant or living on reduced incomes whilst on furlough. In these circumstances, Members expressed the view that an increase in their allowances could not be justified.

During consideration of this item, it was noted that, whilst the IRP was proposing a 2.75 per cent increase to Members' allowances, this figure reflected an increase on a level of allowances not yet in place in Redditch. In Redditch, in the 2020/21 municipal year, there had been no increase to Members' allowances and so the basic allowance for Redditch Members would be closer to five per cent lower than the basic allowance that was in place for other Councillors in Worcestershire where the recommended increase had been agreed.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) travel allowances for 2021-22 continue to be paid in accordance with the HMRC mileage allowance;**
- 2) subsistence allowances for 2021-22 remain unchanged;**
- 3) the Dependent Carer's Allowance remains unchanged; and**

- 4) for Parish Councils in the District, if travel and subsistence is paid, the Panel recommends that it is paid in accordance with the rates paid by Redditch Borough Council and in accordance with the relevant Regulations.

56. DECLARATION OF LAND SURPLUS TO REQUIREMENT AT BADGER CLOSE AND BERKELEY CLOSE, WINYATES AND LEDBURY CLOSE, MATCHBOROUGH

The Principle Solicitor presented a reported which requested that Members consider declaring land at Badger Close and Berkeley Close, Winyates and Ledbury Close, Matchborough, as surplus. The report focused on four sites at these locations, two of which had already secured planning permission.

During consideration of this item an additional recommendation was proposed by Councillor Bill Hartnett. This additional recommendation was seconded by Councillor Greg Chance.

The additional recommendation was:

“That the four sites identified in the report as surplus be retained by the Council and used to build dwellings to increase the number of dwellings in the Council’s own housing stock which will help the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and add to the much needed affordable rented social housing in Redditch.”

In proposing the additional recommendation, Councillor Hartnett commented that there was a need for more social housing in Redditch and the disposal of this land provided an opportunity to invest in more Council houses.

Members discussed the additional recommendation that had been proposed and in so doing referred to the following points:

- There was a lot of land owned by the Council.
- Some of the Council’s land assets were suitable for housing development but other sections of land were not suitable.
- Where land could be developed, sometimes it would be suitable for the Council to develop as Council houses and sometimes it would be more appropriate to sell the land to a private developer.
- The Council would potentially struggle to secure a good rate of return from Council housing in cases where only a single property could be developed on the site concerned.
- The Council was aiming to build Council houses over the following months.
- In previous years, the Council had invested in the mortgage buy back scheme and had provided support to Redditch Co-

operative Homes in the development of hundreds of social housing units.

On being put to the vote the additional recommendation was lost.

RESOLVED that

the land adjacent to No. 29 Berkeley Close, Winyates Green, land adjacent No. 34 Badger Close, Winyates West, land adjacent No. 46 Badger Close, Winyates West and land adjacent No. 54 Ledbury Close, Matchborough East, be declared surplus to Council requirements and disposed of at market value.

57. FLEXIBLE HOMELESSNESS SUPPORT GRANT AND HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION GRANT 2021/22

The Housing Development and Enabling Manager presented a report in respect of the Homelessness Prevention Grant Allocation for 2021/22. Members were advised that the grant was ring fenced by the Government for use in respect of homelessness prevention and support services. The grant included a contribution previously received from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which was allocated to costs involved with the management of temporary accommodation. Officers were proposing the allocation of grant funding to various organisations that provided support to people who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, with a total of £293,209 of the grant having been allocated. It was proposed that authority should be delegated to the Head of Community and Housing Services, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement, to determine how the remaining £21,000 in unallocated grant funding should be spent.

The Committee discussed the report and welcomed the services provided by the various organisations that supported people who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Homelessness Prevention Grant is allocated to the following initiatives which meet the criteria for grant allocation:**

Initiatives	£ (up to)
Redditch Nightstop - Outreach Worker to support 21 to 35 year olds and prevent homelessness or work towards planned moves into suitable and sustainable	31,500

accommodation.	
CCP Rough Sleeper Outreach Service - 2.8 FTE posts across Bromsgrove and Redditch	53,537
Fry Accord – 18 units of supported accommodation for Ex Offenders or those likely to offend	Up to £15,000
St Basils – Provide 23 units of accommodation for young people aged 16- 23 years of age additional funding to provide 24 hour cover following a reduction in funding from County Council	14,200
Newstarts - Furniture Project to provide furniture for homeless households.	5,000
Homelessness Prevention - Spend to Save budget for use by Housing Options Officers	17,060
Temporary Accommodation Management – as 3.1 above	66,380
CCP Rapid Response Winter Weather Team – rapid outreach for any rough sleepers during the coldest months	3,500
St Basils Smallwood Almshouses - Progression Coach to offer additional support that can operate outside of normal office hours to fit around a young persons education, training and employment.	25,700
Housing Options - Tenancy Ready Officers providing training and support to housing applicants to obtain and sustain accommodation.	61,332
Total	£293,209

- 2) **delegated authority be granted to the Head of Community and Housing Services following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing to award any unallocated Grant during the year or make further adjustments to current initiatives in line with Government priorities in 1.2 as necessary to ensure full utilisation of the Grant for 2021/22.**

58. FINAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

The Financial Support Manager presented the Final Council Tax Support Scheme for Members' consideration and in so doing highlighted the following for Members' consideration:

- The new proposed scheme was income banded.
- Should the scheme be approved, there would be an increase in costs for the Council. However, this would be lower than the costs involved in administering the scheme when it was localised in 2014/15.
- The new scheme was designed to streamline the administration involved and to simplify the process to the benefit of both the Council and the customer.
- The new scheme would enable closer integration to occur with Universal Credit. When the DWP notified the Council that a resident was in receipt of Universal Credit this would automatically be taken into account in relation to that customer's Council tax liabilities.
- The links to Universal Credit would make the costs involved with the scheme more predictable for both the Council and residents and would help customers to manage their personal budgets. By contrast, the current scheme was more volatile.
- A total of 100 per cent support would be provided to residents on the lowest incomes. By contrast, the existing scheme required all residents to pay at least 20 per cent of their Council tax.
- A Hardship Scheme would be retained so that financial support could be provided to any residents who were negatively impacted by the changes.
- The Council had undertaken a consultation exercise in respect of the proposed changes. There had been 43 responses to this consultation process, the majority of which had been broadly in favour of the proposed changes.

Members subsequently discussed the proposed changes to the scheme and noted that the new scheme would help to support some of the most vulnerable people in the community. Questions were raised about how the Council's proposed scheme compared to other local authorities' Council Tax Support Schemes. The Committee was informed that a number of Councils, including Wyre Forest District Council, had already introduced an income banded scheme and other authorities were considering doing so. Officers confirmed that there would remain sufficient flexibility within the scheme to make changes where necessary.

RECOMMENDED that

the introduction of a new income banded / grid scheme for working age applicants with effect from 1st April 2021 to implement a modern, future proofed scheme and reduce the administrative burden placed on the Council by the introduction of Universal Credit.

59. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - RENT SETTING 2021/22

The Head of Financial and Customer Services presented a report proposing an increase to the rent that tenants living in Council housing would be charged in 2021/22. The proposal was to increase rents by 1.5 per cent. This was permitted by the Government, which had set out that rents could be increased by CPI plus 1 per cent.

Members noted that the increase in rent was relatively small and would help the Council to start to address gaps in the HRA.

RECOMMENDED that

the actual average rent increase for 2021/22 be set as September 2020 CPI, 0.5%, plus 1% resulting in an increase of 1.5%.

60. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2021/22 TO 2024/25 - UPDATE - PRESENTATION

The Head of Financial and Customer Services delivered a presentation on the subject of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2023/24. During the delivery of this presentation the following matters were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- Officers were undertaking a lot of work in respect of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan, though this remained a work in progress.
- Some additional contributions had been received unexpectedly in the form of New Homes Bonus (NHB) funding, though this was for a one year period only.
- There would be a reduction in the costs of borrowing for the Council as Officers were not anticipating that a number of capital projects would be delivered during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The Government had announced that district Councils could increase Council tax by 1.99 per cent or by £5. The Council had opted to increase Council tax by £5 as this would result in a slightly greater level of return.
- The Lower Tier Services Grant would provide some additional financial support moving forward. This represented top slicing in respect of the previous NHB scheme.
- On the date of the meeting Officers were proposing to use funding from balances and reserves to balance the budget. However, this was not a sustainable position and therefore Officers were aiming to identify alternative measures in order to balance the budget moving forward.

- Should the Council use funding from reserves to balance the budget there was a risk that this would result in the Council's reserves being below the minimum level that had been set for the Council.
- The budget gap was £242,000 for 2021/22 rising to £1.3 million in 2023/24. Therefore, difficult decisions would need to be taken in order to balance the budget.
- Pressures arising from the Covid-19 pandemic had been taken into account when reviewing the budget position.
- Officers had identified some potential savings. However, many of these were very small and more ambitious ideas were needed moving forward.
- The main pressures included footpath maintenance costs, street lighting, Members' allowances and Members' National Insurance contributions.
- In respect of the HRA, a key assumption was that there would be an improvement in the turnaround times for void properties.
- Officers were anticipating that funding would be returned to balances in the HRA.

The Committee subsequently discussed the report and reference was made to the level of grant funding that the Council had received from the Government to help address the costs arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. Officers clarified that in total, £1,952 million had been received by the Council in five tranches from the Government. In addition, the Council had recently received £157,000 to make up for lost income from fees and charges.

Reference was also made to bad debts and the impact that this could have on the Council's budget. Officers explained that the Medium Term Financial Plan took into account anticipated returns from Council tax and non domestic rates. Any deficit in the collection fund was taken into account as part of these calculations.

The position of Rubicon Leisure Limited and the financial support that the Council was providing to the company was also discussed during the meeting. The Committee was informed that the management fee for the company had been incorporated into the Medium Term Financial Plan. However, there was an ongoing review of the company taking place and the management fee would be taken into account as part of that process.

The Financial Services team were thanked for their hard work in respect of the budget. The Chief Executive explained that this was an incredibly challenging time for local government finances. The work on this budget was taking place during a global pandemic, which had impacted on the Council's finances and ability to deliver savings. During the pandemic, new ways of working had been identified and this could potentially create opportunities for the

Council to achieve further savings moving forward. The Committee was informed that Redditch Borough Council had received less financial support from the Government than many other lower tier authorities. As the Borough had many areas with high levels of deprivation it was suggested that there was particular need for further assistance to be provided to Redditch Borough Council in order to assist the local population.

Members noted that additional financial assistance was available to the community from other sources of funding that did not involve the Council. This included financial support available from the Cultural Recovery Fund and the Worcestershire Community Foundation. Furthermore, residents could apply for a £500 payment if they were required to self-isolate having tested positive for Covid-19. The Council had distributed £14.5 million of grant funding to businesses impacted by the pandemic and it was hoped that this would help businesses to remain sustainable moving forward.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

(During consideration of this item there was a brief pause in the meeting, from 7.35 – 7.47 pm, due to problems with the live stream. The Committee did not discuss any business during this period and the final slide of the presentation was revisited in order to provide the information for the consideration of the public.)

61. COUNCIL TAX BASE 2021/22

The Head of Financial and Customer Services presented the Council Tax Base report 2021/22 for Members' consideration. The Committee was advised that the report provided a technical calculation of the Council tax base, in line with Government legislation and national guidance. The calculation took into account the potential for there to be up to two per cent non-payment of Council tax. The anticipated reduction to the Council tax base was driven by the proposed changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme, as the Council was forecasting that less income would be received from Council tax as a result of changes to the scheme.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the calculation of the Council's Tax Base for the whole and parts of the area for 2021/22, be approved; and**
- 2) in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992, the figures calculated by the Redditch Borough Council as its tax base for the whole**

area for the year 2020/21 be 26,158.13 and for the parts of the area listed below be:

Parish of Feckenham	367.22
Rest of Redditch	<u>25,790.91</u>
Total for Borough	<u>26,158.13</u>

62. WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES (WRS) BOARD - RECOMMENDATIONS

The Head of Financial and Customer Services presented recommendations that had been agreed at a recent meeting of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Board. The recommendations focused primarily on the budget for WRS in 2021/22 and Redditch Borough Council was being asked to make a 17.5 per cent contribution.

During consideration of this item Members thanked WRS staff for their hard work during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was noted that WRS had recruited Covid Advisors who were providing advice to residents and businesses about Covid compliance issues.

Concerns were raised about the increase to the fee for the accommodation that was provided to WRS by Wyre Forest District Council and Members expressed disappointment about the way that this proposed increase had been handled. However, it was noted that the contract between WRS and Wyre Forest District Council was due to expire in spring 2021 so alternative and more affordable options could be investigated further. Members were also advised that the Leader had raised his concerns about this matter with the Leader and Chief Executive of Wyre Forest District Council and they had indicated that they would be reviewing the matter.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) that the additional partner liabilities for 2020/2021 in relation to the increase in accommodation charges and ICT hosting from Wyre Forest District Council, be approved as follows:-

Redditch Borough Council	£2k
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- 2) the 2021/2022 gross expenditure budget of £3,739k be approved;
- 3) the 2021/2022 income budget of £529k be approved;

- 4) the revenue budget and partner percentage allocations for 2021/2022 onwards:

Council	£'000	Revised %
Redditch Borough Council	564	17.57

- 5) the additional partner liabilities for 2021/2022 in relation to unavoidable salary pressure be approved.

Redditch Borough Council	£10k
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- 6) the additional partner liabilities for 2021/2022 in relation to three Technical Officers be approved.

Council	Tech Officer Income Generation £000	Tech Officer Animal Activity £000	Tech Officer Gull Control £000
Redditch Borough Council	6	2	

63. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Members were advised that the recommendations arising from the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 3rd December 2020 had been considered at the previous meeting of the Executive Committee.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 3rd December 2020 be noted.

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

Members were advised that there were no referrals for consideration on this occasion.

65. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

The following updates were provided in respect of the Council's Executive Advisory Panels and other bodies:

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

Councillor Lovell confirmed that there had been no further meetings of the Climate Change Cross Party Working Group since the previous meeting of the Executive Committee.

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

Councillor Dormer explained that the meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Party that had been scheduled to take place on 2nd February 2021 had been cancelled due to lack of business.

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

Councillor Nazir advised that a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was not due to take place until later in January 2021.

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

The Committee was advised that a meeting of the Member Support Steering Group was due to take place on 16th February 2021.

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

Councillor Dormer confirmed that there were no meetings of the Planning Advisory Panel scheduled to take place.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 8.01 pm