

Council

Monday, 31 January 2022

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Gareth Prosser (Mayor), Councillor Ann Isherwood (Deputy Mayor) and Councillors Salman Akbar, Imran Altaf, Karen Ashley, Tom Baker-Price, Joanne Beecham, Juliet Brunner, Michael Chalk, Debbie Chance, Brandon Clayton, Luke Court, Matthew Dormer, Aled Evans, Peter Fleming, Alex Fogg, Andrew Fry, Julian Grubb, Lucy Harrison, Anthony Lovell, Emma Marshall, Timothy Pearman, Mike Rouse, David Thain, Craig Warhurst and Jennifer Wheeler

Officers:

Kevin Dicks, Claire Felton and James Howse

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

47. WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all those present to the meeting and outlined the mitigating measures that were in place in relation to Covid-19.

48. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Wanda King and Gemma Monaco.

49. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

50. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of Council held on Monday 15th November 2021 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Mayor.

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Chair

51. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following announcements were made at the meeting:

a) The Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor advised that he had switched on the Christmas lights in Headless Cross on 29th November 2021. The Mayor had also attended the Holocaust Memorial Day service in Redditch on 29th January 2022.

b) The Leader's Announcements

The Leader congratulated the Deputy Leader, Councillor Gemma Monaco, and her husband following the birth of their baby daughter in January 2022. Council was informed that both mother and baby were doing well.

Members were advised that Redditch Borough Council was committed to continuing library provision in Redditch. The Leader's preferred location for the main library in the town would be Redditch Town Hall but the Council needed to work with partner authorities to identify solutions.

c) The Chief Executive's Announcements

The Chief Executive confirmed that he had no announcements to make on this occasion.

52. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 9)

Council was informed that there were no Questions on Notice for consideration on this occasion.

53. MOTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 11)

The Mayor confirmed that no Motions on Notice had been received for consideration at the meeting.

54. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Mayor explained that Council was scheduled to consider recommendations from three separate meetings of the Executive Committee held on 7th December 2021, 15th December 2021 and 11th January 2022. These recommendations were considered in chronological order.

The following reports were discussed in particular detail at the meeting:

Financial Outturn 2020/21 – Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement explained that the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted on the Housing Service, in particular causing delays to work undertaken by the Repairs and Maintenance (R&M) team. However, the restructure of the Housing team had been very successful and had also resulted in some financial savings. The Council would be working with local contractors to help address the backlog in R&M works. The new Housing IT system would also help to streamline the service. Officers were thanked for their hard work in managing the service at a difficult time, particularly the Deputy Chief Executive, the Head of Community and Housing Services and the Head of Environmental and Housing Property Services

During consideration of this item questions were raised about the impact that the new Housing ICT system would have on the Council's budget and the stage that had been reached in terms of the introduction of this system at the Council. Members were advised that the system would enhance the quality of Housing Services delivered at the Council. A more detailed response would be provided after the meeting.

New Cemetery Provision

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services presented the New Cemetery Provision report and in so doing commented that investigation of this subject had been through various stages over a number of years. The latest report on this subject had been pre-scrutinised in detail by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and had also been considered at a meeting of the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee had ultimately determined that there should continue to be burial provision available in the Borough and that Ipsley Meadow would be the preferred site for a new cemetery. Council was required to consider whether to allocate additional funding to the project, which would be used to take action to progress with the new burial site.

After the presentation of the report, the following issues were discussed in detail:

- The decisions that had already been taken on the subject of new cemetery provision by the Executive Committee, which could not be altered by Council.
- The different views that a number of Members had articulated on the subject of the new cemetery provision following publication of the report.
- The discussions that had been held in previous years regarding burial provision in the Borough, dating back to 2009, and the reasons why it had taken time to test the suitability of various different potential sites.

- The length of time in which new cemetery provision remained available in the Borough using existing cemeteries. Council was informed that there was approximately two years' provision of new burial plots remaining available at existing cemeteries in the Borough.
- The consultation that had been undertaken with the public in respect of identifying sites in the Borough that could be used for a new cemetery.
- The opportunities that had been provided for the public to speak on the content of the report at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny and Executive Committee in December 2021.

Council Tax Empty Homes Discounts and Premiums

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Council Tax Empty Homes Discounts and Premiums report for Members' consideration. Council was informed that the aim of the proposals detailed in the report was to discourage property owners from leaving properties vacant. There was significant demand for housing in the Borough and therefore any action that could be taken to ensure that empty homes were made available for residential purposes was to be welcomed.

Following the presentation of the report, Members commented that it was unlikely that the Council would receive a significant amount in revenue as a result of these proposals. However, Members agreed that the proposed action was morally appropriate. There was legislation introduced in 2013 which enabled the Council to take the action proposed.

Independent Remuneration Panel 2022/23

The Leader presented a report that had been prepared by the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP). The IRP, which comprised a panel of independent representatives of the local community, had made recommendations on the subject of Members' allowances. The Panel was thanked for their hard work in reviewing Members' allowances.

The Executive Committee had proposed that the basic allowance received by Members should increase to £4,732, as suggested by the Panel. However, because Members had chosen not to increase Members' allowances for a number of years, this would represent a 6.648 per cent increase to the basic allowance in Redditch, rather than the 1.75 per cent increase recorded in the IRP report. The Executive Committee had also supported the IRP's proposals in respect of; continuing to pay Members' travel allowances in line with the HMRC mileage allowance, Members' subsistence and carers' allowances remaining unchanged and travel and subsistence allowances for Parish Councillors being paid at the same rate as

Borough Councillors where applicable. However, the Executive Committee had not supported the IRP's proposals in respect of the payment of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs).

During consideration of this item an amendment was proposed to the recommendations. This amendment was proposed by Councillor Andrew Fry and seconded by Councillor Debbie Chance. The amendment proposed that the basic allowance for Councillors should increase by 1.75 per cent and that Redditch Members should not continue to be eligible to claim multiple SRAs.

Consideration was given to the proposed amendment. Reference was made to the need for Members to highlight suggestions directly with the IRP about the allowances that would be paid to Members in the following year. In light of this, the amendment was withdrawn without a vote being taken.

HRA Rent Setting 2022/23

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement presented the HRA Rent Setting 2022/23 report for Council's consideration. Members were informed that the proposed increase to rents for Council properties, at 4.1 per cent, was lower than the level of inflation. An increase in rents was occurring at a time when the financial costs involved in procuring materials was increasing and would help the Council to manage those costs.

Fees and Charges 2022/23

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Fees and Charges 2022/23 report and in so doing explained that the majority of fees and charges would be increased by 5 per cent, in line with inflation. However, there were some exceptions to this, including the fee for the Garden Waste Collection service, which would not increase as it was felt that this would not be commercially viable, and Lifeline, Shopmobility and Dial a Ride, which would also not increase due to the vulnerability of the service users.

During consideration of this item, Members noted that the Fees and Charges 2022/23 report had been pre-scrutinised at a meeting of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group. The group had challenged some elements of the report and questioned officers about the content but had been broadly supportive of the proposals.

Reference was made to the proposed increase to the fee that the Council would be charging for the Bulky Waste Collection service. Concerns were raised that the increase to this fee could result in more people choosing to dispose of their bulky waste by fly tipping. However, it was also noted that the fee for Bulky Waste Collections would be increasing by 50 pence and it was suggested that this was

unlikely to impact on a person's choice about whether to use the service.

Council Tax Base 2022/23

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling explained that the Council Tax base was used as the basis for calculating Council Tax. The base was assessed in relation to Council Tax Band D equivalent properties and in order to increase the base the Council needed to ensure more Band D properties were developed in the Borough.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meetings of the Executive Committee held on 7th December 2021, 15th December 2021 and 11th January 2022 be received and all recommendations adopted.

55. URGENT BUSINESS - RECORD OF DECISIONS

Members were informed that no urgent decisions had been taken since the previous meeting of Council.

56. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

Council was advised that there was no urgent business for consideration on this occasion.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.20 pm