



Council

Monday, 11th April, 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, Debbie Chance, Brandon Clayton, Luke Court, Matthew Dormer, Andrew Fry, Julian Grubb, Lucy Harrison, Anthony Lovell, Gemma Monaco, Timothy Pearman, Mike Rouse and David Thain

Officers:

Kevin Dicks, Claire Felton, Sue Hanley and James Howse

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

66. WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all those present to the meeting.

67. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Michael Chalk, Peter Fleming, Alex Fogg, Wanda King, Emma Marshall, Nyear Nazir and Craig Warhurst.

68. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

69. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of Council held on Monday 21st February 2022 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Mayor.

70. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following announcements were made at the meeting:

Chair

a) The Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor explained that he had been unable to attend civic engagements for a period of time due to experiencing the symptoms of long Covid. However, he had attended a performance of 42nd Street at the Palace Theatre, which had been performed by the Studley Operatic Society.

During consideration of this item, Members congratulated Councillor Alex Fogg and his partner on the birth of their baby daughter, Felicity, the previous day. Council was informed that both mother and baby were doing well.

On behalf of the Council, the Mayor thanked those Members who were due to stand down at the forthcoming local elections in May 2022. They were thanked for their hard work and public service during their time as Councillors.

Members joined the Mayor in paying tribute to the Councillors who were due to stand down. In respect of Councillor Debbie Chance, it was commented that she had been a long-serving Member who had acted as both a Portfolio Holder and the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during her time as a Councillor. In relation to Councillor Julian Grubb, Members commented that during his term of office he had been the Deputy Mayor, a Portfolio Holder, the Vice Chair of the Planning Committee and the authority's Armed Forces Champion.

b) The Leader's Announcements

The Leader added his tributes to the Councillors who were due to retire at the forthcoming local elections.

c) The Chief Executive's Announcements

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

71. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COUNCIL

The Mayor announced that former Councillor, Jenny Wheeler, had resigned as a Member with immediate effect from 14th March 2022. On behalf of the Council, the Mayor thanked Mrs Wheeler for her hard work and public service during her two terms of office serving as a Councillor.

During consideration of this item, both group leaders paid tribute to former Councillor Wheeler on behalf of the Council. Members were

advised that Mrs Wheeler had been in the unusual position of having been both Mayor and Deputy Mayor of the Borough of Redditch after previously having served as the consort of another Mayor and Deputy Mayor of the Borough of Redditch, her husband, former Councillor Steve Wheeler, in previous years. Council noted that during her time in office, former Councillor Wheeler had served in a range of additional positions, including Chair of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee, Chair of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel, Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Chair of both the Budget and the Performance Scrutiny Working Groups. She had also been an active member of a number of scrutiny Task Groups over the years. Members commented that she had always been inclusive and worked constructively with Members from all parties. There was general consensus that she was a lovely person.

72. MOTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 11)

The Mayor advised that two Motions on Notice had been received for consideration at the meeting. Usually, in line with requirements detailed in the constitution, Motions on Notice were not permitted for discussion at meetings of Council held during the pre-election period. However, on this occasion, the Mayor had chosen to agree that these Motions should be accepted for debate at the meeting under exceptional circumstances, on the basis that they had received cross-party support and focused on matters of interest to all Councillors.

Remote Meetings

Councillor Gemma Monaco proposed a Motion which called on the Government to permit Councils to hold remote and hybrid Council and Committee meetings. This Motion was seconded by Councillor Andrew Fry.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Monaco commented that during 2020, in the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic, Councils were permitted to hold formal Committee meetings remotely. At Redditch Borough Council, virtual Committee meetings were successfully held on Skype for Business and then subsequently on Microsoft Teams. This helped to ensure that Council business continued at a challenging time whilst also protecting meeting participants from contracting Covid-19.

The regulations that permitted Councils to hold formal Committee meetings remotely expired on 6th May 2021. Since that time, elected Members had been required to attend formal Committee meetings in person if they were to participate in the debate and vote on Council business. The same rule did not apply to Officers (with

some exceptions) who could participate remotely, and steps had been taken to ensure that they could participate in these meetings from home. The public could also participate in Council and Committee meetings both in person and remotely.

Councillor Monaco expressed the view that the option to attend meetings remotely should be extended to elected Members. She suggested that remote meeting arrangements could enable greater participation of Members from a wider variety of backgrounds in Council business. For example, Councillors with work commitments might find it easier to juggle their work and Council duties if they could attend meetings from home or from their place of work. In addition, remote meeting arrangements could help Members with caring responsibilities or specific medical requirements to participate safely in Council and Committee meetings.

Members were reminded that a climate emergency was declared by the Council in September 2019. Remote and hybrid meetings provided opportunities for participants to reduce their carbon footprint, as they would not need to travel to and from Redditch Town Hall. Creating an environment where any participant, including elected Members, could attend a meeting without having a negative impact on the environment would be a positive development for the Council and would support collective aims to address the climate emergency.

In proposing this Motion, Councillor Monaco explained that she was not suggesting that the Council would necessarily want to hold all Council and Committee meetings remotely. Instead, she commented that Councils should be provided with the choice to determine when remote or hybrid meeting arrangements would be most appropriate for their authority and communities. Councils had the software, skills and resources to enable them to hold remote and hybrid meetings and in Redditch these were used when holding informal and private meetings. There was no reason why this should not be extended to formal Committee meetings. Should the Government legislate to allow Councils to hold meetings remotely, the authority would determine what arrangements to have in place in Redditch.

The Motion had been drafted by the Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) and Lawyers in Local Government (LLG). The Motion had received the support of a lot of other Councils across the country, which had already written to the Government regarding this matter. Councillor Monaco urged Members to join her in voting for this Motion, which she suggested would benefit the local democratic process.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Fry commented that as the Council already had the technology available to participate in remote meetings it was important to ensure that it was used. Council meetings held on a face-to-face basis were effective, however, sometimes it was not possible for all Members to join these meetings in person. Council was advised that if the Government agreed to grant powers to Councils to hold remote meetings, it would be necessary to ensure that Councillors' IT equipment and software remained up to date, to ensure that Members could participate in debates and vote on business on the agenda regardless of their location. Equally, it would be important to ensure that the public could continue to participate in and observe Council and Committee meetings, both in person and remotely.

Members subsequently discussed the Motion in detail and in so doing noted that the Government would need to issue primary legislation to enable Councils to hold formal Committee meetings remotely or in hybrid form. Whilst ongoing financial investment in updated ICT equipment and software might be required to enable Members' participation in remote and hybrid meetings, it was suggested that this would be offset by savings in terms of travel mileage claims as well as the positive impact on carbon emissions in the Borough.

RESOLVED that

this Council supports the petition launched by ADSO and LLG on 5th January with regard to remote and hybrid meetings. We agree to write to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities calling on the Government to change the law to allow councils the flexibility to hold such meetings when they deem appropriate within agreed rules and procedures.

Support for Ukraine

Councillor Matthew Dormer proposed a Motion on Notice in respect of support for Ukraine. This Motion was seconded by Councillor Debbie Chance.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Dormer commented that it was with huge regret at the situation that the Motion had been brought forward. However, he welcomed the cross-party support in the Chamber, and this being an opportunity for the Council to recognise the plight and humanitarian devastation caused to those directly affected in Ukraine, and beyond.

The Council was working closely with partners to play a full role in providing support in many practical areas, including accommodation checks, welfare support and funding allocations, and dealing with those in crisis.

Councillor Dormer also commented on his sincere gratitude to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) for their immense work in providing support, and to individuals and families in Redditch and wider afield, who had volunteered as sponsors to open their homes to Ukrainian families and individuals. The Council wanted to recognise the many residents and communities in Redditch for their giving and support to those affected.

In seconding the Motion on Notice, Councillor Chance commented that the situation in Ukraine was horrendous and she paid tribute to Ukrainian citizens who had been impacted by the conflict. Councillor Chance commented that she was proud of the support that the Council had already provided to address this situation and suggested that the authority should do everything possible to increase the speed and efficiency with which visas for Ukrainian refugees were processed and issued. Ordinary citizens and local businesses had been working hard to provide humanitarian assistance and the Council needed to be available to help with this relief effort.

Members subsequently discussed the Motion and welcomed news that Redditch residents were inviting Ukrainian refugees to join them in their homes. The Government would be providing funding to local government to help cover the financial costs arising from supporting Ukrainian refugees, although it was uncertain on the date of the meeting whether this funding would be provided to the County Councils or to the Borough Council. Reference was also made to the timescales for the processing of visas for Ukrainian refugees and it was noted that Worcestershire County Council were working as quickly as possible to process associated DBS checks.

Members expressed great sadness that Ukrainian citizens were suffering during a war in Europe at a time when nations had hoped that there would be no further wars on the continent and that lessons had been learned from previous conflicts. The Council had a moral duty in this context to provide as much support as possible, working alongside partner organisations such as Worcestershire County Council.

RESOLVED that

Redditch Borough Council is saddened and disturbed by the aggression against Ukraine, which has caused horrific devastation, and created an escalating humanitarian crisis with

millions displaced or affected. In light of this, and as a way of expressing support for the people of Ukraine and members of our communities who are from or who have ties with Ukraine this Council;

- a) **Condemns the invasion of Ukraine and stands in solidarity with the people of Ukraine and their families and friends, including those local to Redditch.**
- b) **Stands ready to provide support and open our arms to innocent people displaced and affected.**
- c) **Will work with and support the efforts of our local communities to provide help, support and comfort to those in need**
- d) **Will work to facilitate the safeguarding of any Ukrainian guests alongside the relevant agencies with community partners.**
- e) **Where possible we will deploy a person-centred approach to any funding that is provided by government to support Ukrainian guests, ensuring transparency and accountability of spending to ensure as much funding as possible reaches the people it intends to help**

73. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Mayor explained that there were two sets of minutes from meetings of the Executive Committee held on 21st February and 22nd March 2022. The recommendations that had been made at the meeting of the Executive Committee on 21st February 2022 had been agreed at the Council meeting held on the same date. There had been no recommendations arising at the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 22nd March 2022.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meetings of the Executive Committee held on 21st February and 22nd March 2022 be noted.

74. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

Councillor Debbie Chance, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, presented the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2021/22.

Councillor Chance thanked all Members who had participated in the Overview and Scrutiny process during the year, as well as the

Members, officers and representatives of external organisations who had submitted evidence. In particular, she thanked members of the Committee for their hard work, especially the Vice Chair of the Committee, former Councillor Jenny Wheeler. Members of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group, the Performance Scrutiny Working Group and the Dementia Task Group were also thanked for their hard work. Council Chance concluded by wishing the Overview and Scrutiny Committee well for the 2022/23 municipal year.

Following the presentation of the report, the Leader welcomed the update. He thanked Councillor Chance, in her capacity as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, for her hard work as well as the rest of the Committee. Members were reminded that Overview and Scrutiny was an important part of the local democratic process and the diligence of scrutiny Members was welcomed.

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2021/22 be noted.

**75. CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW WORKING PARTY -
RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented a report detailing recommendations that had been made at the latest meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Party (CRWP).

Members were advised that the report proposed that senior officers should have delegated authority to act in the event of an emergency. It was suggested that it would be sensible to introduce this delegation, which would only be used in the event of an emergency.

In addition, the CRWP had also recommended that no Council meetings should be held during the pre-election period, unless considered to be necessary. Again, Members were advised that this would be a sensible proposal as there were limits on the amount of business that generally could be debated at Council meetings held during these periods.

RESOLVED that

- 1) that the Officer Scheme of Delegations be amended to grant Chief Officers delegated authority to act in the event of an emergency; and**
- 2) as a general rule there should be no full Council meetings in the pre-election period before a Borough election,**

unless the Proper Officer determines that a meeting is required.

76. APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES

Council was advised that, following publication of the agenda for the meeting, it had been determined that a decision in respect of the appointment of a new Chair of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee would be deferred until the following meeting of Council. Consequently, the Vice Chair of the Committee, Councillor Juliet Brunner, would Chair the meeting due to take place on 14th April 2022.

77. URGENT BUSINESS - RECORD OF DECISIONS

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

78. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

There was no urgent business for consideration on this occasion.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 7.38 pm