

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 6th September,
2022

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), Councillor Nyear Nazir (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Karen Ashley, Peter Fleming, Lucy Harrison and Emma Marshall

Also Present:

Councillors Joe Baker and Sharon Harvey

Officers:

Peter Carpenter, Amanda Delahunty, Kevin Dicks, Clare Flanagan, Sue Hanley, Michelle Howell and Michael Rowan

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

38. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Joanne Beecham, Anthony Lovell and Craig Warhurst.

39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

During consideration of Minute Item No. 44 – Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England & Wales) Regulations 2015 - Councillors Matthew Dormer, Emma Marshall and Nyear Nazir declared pecuniary interests in their capacity as private sector landlords.

40. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader advised that at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Monday 5th September 2022, Members had pre-scrutinised the Nomination of the Community House at Easemore Road – Asset of Community Value report. The Committee had endorsed Option (b) in the report, proposing that the Council should not support listing the community house at Easemore Road as an asset of community value. Copies of the Committee's recommendation were tabled at the Executive Committee meeting (Appendix 1).

Chair

The Budget Scrutiny Working Group had been due to pre-scrutinise the Finance Improvement / Recovery Plan and the Budget Framework and Finance and Performance Quarter 1 Monitoring Reports on 1st September 2022. However, that meeting had not gone ahead as it was not quorate and the group was therefore reconvening to consider the reports on 7th September 2022. Therefore, there were no recommendations from the Budget Scrutiny Working Group for consideration at the Executive Committee meeting.

41. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday 26th July 2022 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

42. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Members were advised that no Questions on Notice had been submitted for consideration at the meeting.

43. NOMINATION OF THE COMMUNITY CENTRE AT EASEMORE ROAD - ASSET OF COMMUNITY VALUE

The Principal Solicitor presented a report concerning a proposal for the community house at Easemore Road to be listed as an asset of community value. Members were asked to note that the Executive Committee was receiving the report on a consultative basis, although officers had delegated authority to determine whether a property should be listed as an asset of community value.

Members were advised that under the Localism Act 2011 there was a requirement for the Council to maintain a list of local assets of community value. The community could, as on this occasion, request that particular assets were added to the local list of assets of community value. On this occasion, as the community house at Easemore Road was owned by the Council, an independent barrister had been appointed to review the proposal. The Executive Committee had agreed at a meeting held on 12th July 2022 to dispose of the community house at Easemore Road. A request had subsequently been received for the property to be listed as an asset of community value. There was a statutory test for registering a property as an asset of community value, which had been taken into account by the independent barrister. The conclusions reached by the independent barrister had been recorded in his words at paragraph 4.4 in the report.

During consideration of this item, Members noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had pre-scrutinised the report at a meeting held on 5th September 2022. At the end of the Committee's debate, Members had recommended that the Council should endorse option (b) in the report, which was to not support listing the community house at Easemore Road as an asset of community value.

The Executive Committee subsequently discussed the report in detail and in doing so commented on the following:

- The value of the services provided by the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) groups that currently rented space in the community house at Easemore Road. Members commented that it was these services, rather than the building itself, which were assets in the Borough.
- The potential for VCS organisations to rent space in other buildings located in the Borough.
- The opportunities available for VCS groups to continue to deliver services in the Borough should the community house at Easemore Road be sold.
- The extent to which the community house at Easemore Road had any historic features. Officers advised that they had not been made aware of any historical significance in respect of the community house at Easemore Road.
- The extent to which the community house at Easemore Road was accessible. Members suggested that more residents with physical disabilities would be able to access the services provided by the VCS groups currently renting space in the community house at Easemore Road should those groups relocate to alternative bases that were more accessible.
- The work that had been undertaken by the independent barrister with expertise in relevant legislation, who had concluded that the community house at Easemore Road should not be listed as an asset of community value.
- The timeframes in which the regime had existed under which properties could be listed as assets of community value and whether any requests had previously been received for the property to be listed as an asset of community value. Officers advised that the regime for listing assets of community value had been in place since 2012 and this was the first time that a request had been made to list the community house at Easemore Road as an asset of community value.
- The stakeholders who could submit a request to list a property as an asset of community value. Officers confirmed that the Council could not choose to list properties as assets of community value. Instead, representatives of the local

community needed to submit requests to list assets under this regime.

RESOLVED

not to support listing the community house at Easemore Road as an Asset of Community Value.

44. ENERGY EFFICIENCY (PRIVATE RENTED PROPERTY) (ENGLAND & WALES) REGULATIONS 2015

The Head of Community and Housing Services presented a report on the subject of the Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England & Wales) Regulations 2015.

During consideration of this item, Councillors Matthew Dormer, Emma Marshall and Nyear Nazir declared pecuniary interests in their capacity as private sector landlords. As their departure meant that there were only three councillors remaining in the room, there was no quorum present for consideration of this item. For this reason, the report was postponed for consideration at the following meeting of the Committee.

45. FIRST HOMES

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager presented a report on the subject of First Homes.

The Executive Committee was informed that the Government had introduced the First Homes Scheme in 2021. This required housing developments agreed from March 2022 onwards to include First Homes. The First Homes were subject to a discount on the price and only first time buyers were eligible to purchase homes under the scheme. The aim of the scheme was to increase the proportion of affordable homes available to prospective purchasers.

Local authorities could opt to include local connection criteria in the application of the First Homes scheme locally. This was a discretionary part of the scheme which Officers were suggesting should apply in Redditch due to the level of demand for affordable housing in the Borough. There were a few exemptions on the local connection criteria, including in respect of veterans leaving the armed forces.

There would be a fee of £150 applicable to First Homes. This fee would be included in the Fees and Charges report, due for Members' consideration later in the municipal year.

Following the presentation of the report, Members requested clarification about the extent to which there would be flexibility applied in the local connection criteria in relation to family members. In raising this issue, Members commented that modern families could comprise a range of connections, including those involving stepparents, grandparents and half siblings. The Committee was assured that Officers would have discretion when applying the policy in relation to the local connection criteria.

RESOLVED that

the Council adopt the First Homes Policy and delegate authority to the Head of Community Services, following consultation with the Housing Portfolio Holder, to make an amendments to the Policy to reflect any future Government Guidance.

46. WORCESTERSHIRE HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager also presented the Worcestershire Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for the Executive Committee's consideration.

Members were advised that there was a legal requirement for all Councils to have a homelessness strategy. The Council's existing homelessness strategy was due to expire on 31st December 2022. The new Worcestershire Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy had been developed by Worcestershire Councils working together and had involved consultation with partner organisations.

There could be a number of causes of homelessness. This included a breakdown in relationships, domestic violence and family and friends deciding that they could no longer provide accommodation to somebody. The statistics provided in the report for homelessness and rough sleeping were based on figures recorded during the Covid-19 pandemic. Members were asked to note that the numbers were likely to change due to a range of factors, including the impact of the cost of living crisis. Officers would be reviewing the content of the strategy on a regular basis to ensure that it remained fit for purpose.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed the strategy in detail and in doing so commented that it was important to have a robust policy in place to help ensure that the Council could support people experiencing homelessness or rough sleeping. Members commented that there were some homeless people who might not be willing to engage with the Council initially who might subsequently wish to do so. Reference was also made

to particularly vulnerable groups, such as victims of domestic abuse, and Members praised officers and partner organisations that had continued to support victims of domestic abuse throughout the pandemic.

During consideration of this item, Members commented that in the report it had been noted that the strategy would be subject to continuing review. As part of this process, Members suggested that consideration should be given to the contribution that experiencing a bereavement could make to a person's risk of becoming homeless.

Consideration was also given to rules in respect of Council house tenancies. Officers explained that the Council had to follow a statutory regime in relation to Council house tenancies and the Council did not have discretion in relation to the succession of tenancies to family members.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the draft Worcestershire Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-25 and action plan be approved for public consultation; and**
- 2) delegated authority be given to the Head of Community and Housing Services, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement, to agree any changes that may be required following the consultation process.**

47. FINANCE IMPROVEMENT/RECOVERY PLAN

The Interim Section 151 Officer presented a report on the subject of financial improvements and a recovery plan for the Council.

The Executive Committee was informed that some financial issues for the Council had been identified by the external auditors and highlighted with the authority earlier in the year. This included:

- Significant staff turnover within the Financial Services department, resulting in concerns about capacity within the team and the impact on services.
- Limited financial and performance monitoring in the 2021/22 financial year.
- Problems with the Council's new financial system, which had delayed submission of the Council's accounts for the 2020/21 and 2021/22 financial years.

The report detailed the action that had already been taken, and continued to occur, in respect of the Council's improvement plan to address these concerns. This included recruiting a significant number of new staff to the Financial Services team, including a new Head of Finance and Customer Services. Financial monitoring reports had been reintroduced, including a report covering the first 11 months of the 2021/22 financial year. The Audit, Governance and Standards Committee had approved a new Risk Management Strategy for the Council and quarterly risk monitoring reports were scheduled for consideration, with the latest such report having been considered in summer 2022. The first combined finance and performance monitoring report was due for consideration during the Executive Committee meeting.

There remained some problems with the Council's new finance system, principally the cash receipting part of the system. However, it was anticipated that these problems would be resolved in the following few weeks. Fixes to other parts of the system had resulted in the Council being able to make a number of returns to the Government as part of the account setting process and it was anticipated that the accounts for the 2020/21 and 2021/22 financial years would be finalised shortly for submission.

The Executive Committee subsequently discussed the report in detail and in doing so welcomed the progress that had been made with resolving issues with the Council's new finance system. Questions were raised about the number of vacancies remaining in the Financial Services team and the impact that this was having on service delivery. Members were informed that there remained four vacancies within the department, three of which were being filled by agency staff until permanent replacements could be recruited.

RESOLVED that

- 1) progress made on the following eight key tasks for financial recovery be noted:**
 - **Financial Strategies**
 - **Revenue and Capital Monitoring**
 - **Closure**
 - **Returns**
 - **Projects**
 - **Systems**
 - **Documentation and Training**
 - **Resources**

- 2) the work still required to move back to a best practice operation and the associated timetable for completion of this work be noted.**

48. DRAFT COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2023/24

The Interim Section 151 Officer presented the draft Council Tax Support Scheme 2023/24 for the Executive Committee's consideration.

Members were advised that there was a requirement for the Council to review and consult with the public on proposed changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme on an annual basis. In undertaking the review on this occasion, Officers had identified three potential options available to the Council:

- Option A – This option would involve increasing the income bands in the existing scheme in line with inflation and would introduce a disregard for childcare costs.
- Option B – The second option would increase the support available at bands 2 to 4 of the scheme and would provide additional support to low income households. There would also be the introduction of a disregard for childcare costs.
- Option C – The third option mirrored the changes proposed in Option B but would involve increasing the support available at bands 2 to 4 by a greater amount than for Option B.

Officers were suggesting that Option B was the most appropriate option for the Council to adopt moving forward. This would result in an increase in the number of residents eligible to receive support as well as the amount of support available. However, the financial impact on the Council and partner organisations would be less severe than for Option C.

In reviewing the options, Members were asked to note that, whilst Redditch Borough Council was the authority responsible for collecting Council Tax, Worcestershire County Council received the majority of income from Council Tax contributions. Redditch Borough Council only received 13 per cent of the income from Council Tax.

Members discussed the report and in doing so agreed that it would be appropriate to propose Option B for consultation with the public. In proposing Option B, Members commented that this option would help to provide support to more eligible residents than the current scheme and would increase the support available. However, this option would have less of a detrimental impact on the Council's finances than Option C, which was important to take into account at a challenging time for local government finances.

During consideration of this item, Officers highlighted that the report had stated that Members were being asked to recommend a preferred option to Council. However, as the decision that was

being taken was to identify an option for consultation with the public, rather than to determine a change to the Council Tax Support Scheme, this decision could be resolved by the Executive Committee.

RESOLVED that

Option B for the draft Council Tax Support Scheme is put out for Consultation.

49. BUDGET FRAMEWORK AND FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE QUARTER 1 MONITORING REPORT

The Head of Finance and Customer Services presented the Budget Framework and Finance and Performance Quarter 1 Monitoring Report for Members' consideration.

The Committee was informed that the finance and performance monitoring reports would be presented for the Executive Committee's consideration on a quarterly basis. Based on performance to date, by the end of the first quarter an underspend of £21,000 was anticipated in the revenue budget by the end of the 2022/23 financial year. Actual spend in the first quarter of the 2022/23 financial year on the capital programme was valued at £3.1 million out of a total capital budget of £10.8 million.

Officers were proposing that the Council should consider increasing the Operational Bank Account limit to £2 million. The Council had the discretion to set this figure and the change would reflect current operating practices. Members were also being asked to consider adopting a new Asset Strategy.

Information had been included in the report in respect of the performance of Council services. This included data for performance in relation to the Council's strategic purposes as well as operational indicators.

Following the presentation of the report, Member discussed the content in detail. Reference was made to the figures that had been recorded in the report for revenue expenditure in the Chief Executive's department, which had been recorded as both an overspend and an underspend of £1,000. Officers confirmed that there was a typographical error in the report and this should have been recorded as an underspend of £1,000 but noted that this was correctly reflected in the table on the previous page.

Consideration was given to the discussions that had been held between representatives of the Financial Services department and Heads of Service and questions were raised about when the

outcomes of these discussions would be reported to Members. Officers explained that further information would be reported to Members on this subject in October 2022.

Reference was made to the data that had been recorded for the take up of nursery places in the Borough. Members commented that this had been recorded as 59 per cent, however, at recent meetings at Worcestershire County Council County Councillors had been informed that the rate was 81 per cent. The Committee was informed that the figures provided in the report had been based on the latest data provided to Redditch Borough Council by Worcestershire County Council and related to performance in 2021.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the current financial position in relation to Revenue and Capital Budgets for the period April to June 2022 be noted;**
- 2) **the Quarter 1 Performance data for the Period April to June 2022 be noted;**

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **the Operational Bank Account limit is raised to £2 million; and**
- 2) **the Asset Disposal Strategy is approved for implementation.**

50. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair confirmed that there were no outstanding recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 23rd June, 7th July and 21st July 2022 be noted.

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

There were no referrals from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or Executive Advisory Panels on this occasion.

52. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

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

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

In Councillor Lovell's absence, the Chair advised that there had been no meetings of the Climate Change Cross Party Working Group since the previous meeting of the Committee.

- 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 in October 2022.

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

Councillor Nazir advised that there had been no further meetings of the Corporate Parenting 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 Member Support Steering Group was due to take place in October 2022.

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

Members were informed that there had been no meetings of the Planning Advisory Panel since the previous meeting of the Executive Committee and there were no further meetings scheduled to take place by the date of the Executive Committee meeting.

53. **TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE HEAD OF LEGAL, DEMOCRATIC AND PROPERTY SERVICES PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEETING AND WHICH THE CHAIR, BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, CONSIDERS TO BE OF SO URGENT A NATURE THAT IT CANNOT WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING**

The Chair confirmed that there was no urgent business for consideration on this occasion.

However, prior to the closure of the meeting, the Chair thanked the Principal Solicitor, Ms Clare Flanagan, for her hard work and support over many years working for the Council. On behalf of all Members, the Chair expressed hopes that she would have a long and happy retirement.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.25 pm

Appendix 1 – Executive Committee Meeting, 6th September 2022

Item 6: Nomination of Community House at Easemore Road – Asset of Community Value

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee RECOMMENDS that

Executive Committee consider the contents of the report in relation to Community House and decide to not support listing Community House as an Asset of Community Value.

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