

MINUTES

Present:

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

Also Present:

Councillors Joe Baker, Joanna Kane and Sid Khan

Officers:

Peter Carpenter, Amanda Delahunty, Kevin Dicks, Claire Felton, Sue Hanley and Michelle Howell

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

116. APOLOGIES

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

117. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

118. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

119. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 10th January 2023 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

120. HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT 2023/24

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager presented a report focusing on the Council's Homelessness Prevention Grant funding for 2023/24.

The Council had been awarded a total of £325,375 in Homelessness Prevention Grant by the Government for the 2023/24 financial year. In addition, there had been a £35,000 underspend in the fund in the 2022/23 financial year which would be available to use the following year. The funding was ring fenced to support initiatives designed to prevent homelessness. In considering the content of the report, Members were asked to note that the Council had a statutory duty under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended), to assist people threatened with homelessness as well as additional duties relating to preventing homelessness and rough sleeping.

The report outlined the various different local schemes that officers were proposing should be supported using funding from the Homelessness Prevention Grant in 2023/24. The proposed schemes included initiatives delivered by partner organisations in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) which would help many residents including vulnerable groups at particular risk of becoming homeless, such as people leaving prison and young people. There was a risk that if the Council did not support these schemes, the authority might need to cover increasing costs for the provision of temporary accommodation in Bed and Breakfast establishments.

Following the presentation of the report, the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement commented that he welcomed the Homelessness Prevention Grant funding and the positive impact that use of this funding could have on tackling homelessness in the Borough. In particular, he highlighted the work to help vulnerable groups at greater risk of becoming homeless and the excellent work that various VCS organisations were already delivering in the local community to address this issue.

During consideration of this item, the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement proposed an alteration to the wording of the second recommendation detailed in the report. This proposed that, in respect of the delegation to the Head of Community and Housing Services to use any unallocated grant funding during the year and to make further adjustments where appropriate, the delegation should apply following consultation with both the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement as well as the Portfolio Holder for Community Services and Regulatory Services. This proposal was made on the basis of the importance of this funding to the local community. The alteration was agreed by Members.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the following initiatives be approved to receive allocation of funding 2023/24:**

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 accommodation.	17,769
Redditch Nightstop Core Funding	8,667
Redditch Nightstop Safe Accommodation and Support	20,000
CCP Rough Sleeper Outreach Service	47,556
GreenSquare Accord – 18 units of supported accommodation for Ex Offenders or those likely to offend	16,049
St Basils – Provide 24 hour cover to 23 units of accommodation for young people aged 16- 23 years	14,910
Newstarts - Furniture Project to provide furniture for homeless households.	10,000
Homelessness Prevention - Spend to Save budget for use by Housing Options Officers	17,060
Temporary Accommodation Management – as 3.1 above	66,380
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.	19,287
Citizens Advice Debt Advice	16,333
St Basils Young Persons Pathway Worker	18,195
St Basils Crash Pad emergency accommodation	35,086
County Partnership Manager	8,300
Batchley Support Group	10,000

Single and Childless Couples Homeless Prevention Service	33,460
Total	£359,052

- 2) **delegated authority be granted to the Head of Community and Housing Services following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement and the Portfolio Holder for Community Services and Regulatory Services to use any unallocated Grant during the year or make further adjustments as necessary to ensure full utilisation of the Grants for 2023/24 in support of existing or new schemes.**

121. INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL REPORT 2023/24

The Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services presented the Independent Remuneration Panel's (IRP's) report concerning Members' allowances for the 2023/24 financial year.

The Executive Committee was informed that the IRP comprised a membership of independent persons who lived in Worcestershire. The IRP made recommendations about Members' allowances for most Councils in the county. Whilst the Council was not obliged to approve the IRP's proposals, Members needed to have due regard to the IRP's recommendations.

The IRP was proposing that the basic allowance for Members should be increased by 7.37 per cent, which would increase the basic allowance from £4,732 to £5,081. The IRP had also made proposals regarding the Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) that could be paid to Members for holding specific posts at the Council. Members were asked to note that the IRP did not suggest paying multiple SRAs to individual Members which was an arrangement that was currently in place in Redditch. Should Members approve the IRP's recommendation in respect of SRAs in this report, this would result in a saving to the Council.

Members discussed the proposals detailed in the IRP's report and in doing so commented that it would be inappropriate to increase Members' allowances by 7.37 per cent during a cost of living crisis. However, it was suggested that the Council should not postpone increases to Members' allowances indefinitely, as this would place the level of remuneration available to Redditch Members behind that available at other local authorities in Worcestershire. Members would have an opportunity to consider this further at a later date when preparing for the 2024/25 financial year. There was general consensus that, as no changes were proposed by the IRP in respect of travel allowances, subsistence expenses and carer's

allowances, the recommendations on these subjects should be supported.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) travel allowances for 2023-24 continue to be paid in accordance with the HMRC mileage allowance;**
- 2) subsistence allowances for 2023-24 remain unchanged;**
- 3) the Dependent Carer's Allowance remains unchanged; and**
- 4) for the Parish Council in the Borough, if travel and subsistence is paid, that it is paid in accordance with the rates paid by the Borough Council and in accordance with the relevant Regulations.**

122. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2023/24

The Interim Section 151 Officer presented the Pay Policy Statement 2023/24 for Members' consideration.

The Executive Committee was informed that there was a legal requirement, under the Localism Act 2011, for the Council to adopt a Pay Policy Statement on an annual basis. This statement needed to outline the relationships between the lowest and highest paid staff employed by the Council and therefore a breakdown of pay was provided per pay scale, including in respect of the most senior positions. The remuneration for management graded posts was reviewed by an external assessor.

Members were informed that in each grade there were a number of scales of pay. Staff progressed up these scales based on performance which was assessed during annual appraisals. The Appointments Committee was involved in appointing the most senior staff, including the statutory officer positions of Head of Paid Service, Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer as well as Chief Officer positions.

The report was discussed by Members and it was noted that a typographical error had been made in respect of the title of the report. It was suggested that this should be addressed prior to the publication of the report for the consideration of Council.

RECOMMENDED that

the Pay Policy Statement 2023/24 be approved.

**123. 2023/24 BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN
2023/24 TO 2025/26 (INCLUDING TREASURY MANAGEMENT
STRATEGY AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME)**

The Interim Section 151 Officer presented the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2023/24 to 2025/26 (including the Treasury Management Strategy and the Capital Programme) for the Executive Committee's consideration.

Members were asked to note the following when considering the report:

- The report built on the tranche 1 savings of £1.5 million that had been agreed in November 2022.
- An assumption had been made that the Council would agree a 2.99 per cent increase to Council Tax for 2023/24. A report on the subject of Council Tax Resolutions would be presented for the Executive Committee's consideration at a meeting scheduled to take place on 27th February 2023.
- The costs to the Council arising from the pay award to staff for 2021/22 had been slightly less than previously anticipated due to staff vacancies.
- The funding from Government for the Council represented a one-year settlement.
- Final figures had been received from the actuaries for the local government pension contributions for staff which had been taken into account in the report.
- Funding had been set aside for anticipated increases to the costs of utilities, with 50 per cent allocated to the base budget and 50 per cent to earmarked reserves, the value of which would fall over the three-year period of the MTFP. This arrangement was in place as it was anticipated that utilities costs would start to decline during the period of the plan.
- Whilst there would be income from business rates, Officers were assuming that there would be a high level of non-payment and this had been taken into account when preparing the report.
- There were a number of additional pressures that had been reflected in the proposed budget:
 - Refurbishment of the Council's vehicle fleet and fuel payments. Members were advised that there would be a need to respond to requirements set out in the Environment Act. The costs of biofuels, compared to diesel, were increasing and this would also need to be taken into account.
 - There was a fund for apprenticeships and Officers were aiming to link this to staff grades in order to take advantage of the Government's apprenticeship levy.

- There was a need to fund a new Data Analyst post. At present, there was only one member of staff at the Council trained on how to undertake this work and Officers believed that the Council's system, Power BI, could be used more effectively.
- There remained pressures arising from planning enforcement.
- Council Tax collection rates for the 2022/23 financial year were at around 98 per cent and this was taken into account when calculating likely income from Council Tax for subsequent years.
- The Corporate Management Team (CMT) had reviewed the earmarked reserves in December 2022, as there were a number of reserves that had not been used for some time. As a consequence, a number of the reserves had been released, including funding that would be used to address the rising costs of utilities.
- Officers were assuming that the general fund would be in a surplus position by the third year of the plan, although there would be gaps to address in the first and second years.
- By the third year, the Council was projected to have reserves of £2.1 million. The Government suggested that Councils should have reserves equivalent to 5 per cent of the authority's income. The Interim Section 151 Officer was suggesting that in Redditch, reserves should represent closer to 9 per cent of income, to take account of debts and expenditure too.
- Action would need to continue to be taken to raise the reserves in the general fund. Therefore, Members and Officers would be encouraged to continue to consider efficiencies that could be made in service delivery as well as potential savings.
- Legally, all buildings in the public sector would need to have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of E or better by 2026. Some buildings could potentially be upgraded but others might have more complex issues and would potentially need to be sold.
- Staff retention and recruitment remained an area of concern for local government in the West Midlands, including for Redditch Borough Council. Therefore, there was a need to review how best to attract and retain skilled and qualified staff moving forward.
- There was the potential that some redundancy payments would need to be made. However, given there were in excess of 100 vacancies in the shared services between Redditch Borough and Bromsgrove District Councils, it was possible that staff placed at risk in service reviews could be redeployed in other departments.

- The capital programme was underspent. However, there were some significant projects included in the capital programme, including the replacement of the vehicle fleet and expenditure of the Town's Fund on the regeneration of Redditch town centre.
- Members had recently agreed that the rents for Council house tenants should increase by 7 per cent. Whilst Officers were working on the basis that a similar increase would occur in 2024/25, for service planning purposes, decisions could only be taken on a yearly basis regarding rent increases and the report in respect of the following financial year could therefore contain different proposals.
- The Treasury Management Strategy had also been included in the report, which detailed how the Council intended to approach borrowing. Members were asked to note that the Government no longer permitted local authorities to borrow for yield.
- The Council had not had to borrow to fund the capital programme since 2011 and it appeared likely that the authority would be able to continue to use internal resources to fund the capital programme over the following three years.
- The Investment Strategy detailed the support that could be provided to local groups where needed, subject to submission of robust business cases.

The Interim Section 151 Officer concluded the presentation of the MTFP by outlining his views of the robustness of the budget and the risks associated with the budget. Members were advised that a number of risks had been identified which included:

- The Council's 2021/22 accounts had not yet been closed, although Officers were close to completing this work.
- An overspend was anticipated for the 2022/23 financial year.
- The impact of inflation on the costs of service and project delivery remained an area of concern.
- There was a risk that the authority could potentially lose key personnel due to the age profile of the Council's existing workforce.
- The authority needed to lobby the Government regarding calculations for the Council Tax Base. The Council was placed at a disadvantage as the Council Tax Base was calculated based on the number of band d equivalent properties in the local authority area and the majority of houses in Redditch were classified as bands a – c.
- The Council needed to complete projects, for which the authority had received grant funding from the Government, within relatively tight timescales, including for the regeneration of the town centre. Should these works not be completed to

deadline, the Council would have to return funding to the Government.

The Interim Section 151 Officer had concluded that the figures contained in the MTFP were robust. There were also adequate reserves, although more efficiencies needed to be achieved in order to ensure that there remained sufficient reserves moving forward.

Following the presentation of the report, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling thanked the Interim Section 151 Officer, the Head of Finance and Customer Services and the rest of the Finance Department for their hard work on the budget. It was suggested that the content of the budget was more transparent and easier to follow than it had been in previous years, due to the layout of the report.

Members acknowledged that there remained financial challenges which would need to be addressed by the Council moving forward. In particular, Members noted that there was a need to maximise use of grant funding. It was also noted that Portfolio Holders had collective responsibility for ensuring that they questioned Officers about services within their remit and took nothing for granted.

RECOMMENDED approval of

- 1) the tranche 2 growth proposals;**
- 2) the additional funding to the Council as per the Local Government Settlement on the 19th December 2022, including the estimated levels for 2024/5 and 2025/6;**
- 3) the tranche 2 savings proposals, including an Increase of Council Tax at 2.99 per cent;**
- 4) the Capital Programme 2023/4 to 2025/6 and associated projects where outstanding budgets will be allowed to be carried forward at the end of the 2022/23 financial year;**
- 5) the levels of reserve being carried forward into future years;**
- 6) the level of General Fund balances being used to balance budgets over the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) period; and**

RESOLVED that

- 7) **the Chief Financial Officer's (CFO) Opinion on Estimates and Reserve Levels – the Robustness Statement (Section 25 Statement) – be noted.**

124. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Members were informed that there were no outstanding recommendations arising from the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 8th December 2022 requiring the Executive Committee's consideration.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 8th December 2022 be noted.

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

Members were advised that there were no referrals from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or any of the Executive Advisory Panels for consideration on this occasion.

126. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORTS

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

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

In Councillor Lovell's absence, Members noted that a meeting of the Climate Change Cross Party Working Group had taken place in December 2022. During this meeting, Members had discussed the planning process and action that could be taken in relation to this process to enhance the biodiversity of the local environment.

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

Councillor Dormer explained that a meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Party had taken place on 23rd January 2023. During this meeting, Members had considered a number of reports and had made some recommendations about changes that could be made to the constitution. These recommendations were due to be considered at the following

meeting of Council scheduled to take place on 27th February 2023.

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

Councillor Nazir commented that there had been a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board on 31st January 2023. During this meeting, the Board had learned that there had been a recent spike in the number of school exclusions taking place. The situation in respect of this matter had improved slightly between autumn 2021 and 2022 and the Virtual Schools Board was working with local schools to address this problem.

The numbers of unaccompanied child asylum seekers in Worcestershire had increased from 29 to 89. The children, some of whom had escaped from war zones, were provided with support and the Board was working hard to ensure that this support met their needs.

The Executive Committee was reminded that Councillor Nazir was the Board's District lead for employment and apprenticeships. It was noted that Redditch Borough Council had signed up to the pledge to help care leavers secure apprenticeships and it was hoped that some care leavers would therefore apply to take up apprenticeship opportunities at the Council.

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

Members were advised that a meeting of the Member Support Steering Group had taken place on 17th January 2023. During this meeting, the group had considered feedback provided by Councillors in completed surveys on the subject of reducing paper waste for Council and Committee meetings. Based on the feedback received, as well as the need to address pledges in the Council's Carbon Reduction Plan to reduce paper waste, the group had agreed that there should be an assumption that all Members would go paperless moving forward. However, individual Councillors could opt to continue to receive paper copies of agenda packs and Members were urged to notify Democratic Services by Friday 17th February 2023 if they wanted to continue to receive paper copies of agenda packs.

Councillor Dormer advised that there was due to be a Member training session focusing on how to use the modern.gov app, which was scheduled to take place in the evening on 13th

February 2023. This training would outline how the app could be used to access and annotate agenda packs electronically and Members were urged to attend this session.

The Member Support Steering Group had also agreed at their latest meeting that, where Councillors continued to receive paper copies of agenda packs, they should collect these from their post trays at the Town Hall. This represented a return to the arrangements that had been in place for many years prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

e) Planning Advisory Panel – Chair, Councillor Matthew Dormer

Councillor Dormer confirmed that there had been no meetings of the Planning Advisory Panel (PAP) since the previous meeting of the Executive Committee.

The Meeting commenced at 5.30 pm
and closed at 6.18 pm