



Executive Committee

Tuesday, 21st March, 2023

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), and Councillors Karen Ashley, Joanne Beecham, Peter Fleming, Lucy Harrison and Craig Warhurst

Officers:

Peter Carpenter, Mark Cox, Kevin Dicks, Jonathan Elger, Claire Felton, Sue Hanley, Michelle Howell, Claire Jones, Helen Keightley, Ryan Keyte, Simon Parry, Chris Poole and Judith Willis

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

136. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Anthony Lovell, Emma Marshall and Nyear Nazir.

137. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

138. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader explained that three agenda packs, including two supplementary packs, had been published for consideration at the meeting. Due to the length of the Housing Policies report, only the covering report had been included in the main agenda pack. The full report had been published in a supplementary pack together with a copy of the presentation prepared for the item and a small number of paper copies of this pack had been printed in order to minimise the amount of paper generated for the meeting, in line with the Council's commitments in the Carbon Reduction Plan.

The Executive Committee was advised that at a meeting held on 16th March 2023, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had pre-scrutinised Minute Items No.s 140 and 142 – the Air Quality

Chair

Enhanced Monitoring Options Report and the Housing Policies report. At the end of lengthy debates in respect of both items, the Committee had endorsed the recommendations in the reports. On behalf of the Executive Committee, the Leader thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their hard work reviewing these reports.

139. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Monday 27th February 2023 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

140. AIR QUALITY ENHANCED MONITORING OPTIONS REPORT

The Technical Services Manager, Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS), presented the Air Quality Enhanced Monitoring Options report for the Executive Committee's consideration.

The report outlined WRS's air quality monitoring regime, which focused on monitoring pollutants that could impact on air quality. WRS had submitted a bid to the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) for grant funding to support enhanced air quality monitoring. This bid had been successful, although DEFRA required recipients of this grant funding to agree to 10 per cent match funding in order for the grant to be provided.

The grant funding would enable WRS to monitor additional particulates in the air that were not usually monitored in the Borough. It was proposed that this funding should be used to support monitoring over a two-year period in two particular areas in the Borough.

Members were asked to note that there were no particular areas of concern in terms of air quality in Redditch, when compared to other parts of the country. However, Officers would be analysing the potential impact of solid fuel burning in urban areas as well as pollutants relating to agricultural work in rural parts of the Borough. There was the possibility that, depending on the outcomes of the monitoring and the data uncovered, behaviour change might be needed.

RECOMMENDED that

following the successful outcome of the air quality grant bid to Defra, match funding totalling £2,300 be funded from Corporate Earmarked Reserves over the life of the project.

141. OFF-STREET PARKING ORDER

The Litigation Solicitor presented a report on the subject of the Off Street Parking Order for Council car parks.

Members were advised that the Council did not have an Off Street Parking Order in place and it had been felt that one was needed. There were specific legislative requirements in relation to the process for introducing Off Street Parking Orders and the Council needed to comply with these rules. The Executive Committee had previously considered the subject of Off Street Parking Orders in 2009 but this had never been implemented. The proposed Off Street Parking Order had been updated since the version considered in 2009, to include reference to matters such as electric charging points for vehicles. The order would enable the Council to issue Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) and to undertake enforcement action in the car parks covered by the order.

The full list of Council car parks had not been included within the list of car parks that would be subject to the order. Instead, a decision had been taken to focus on providing enforcement powers at car parks where this was considered to be desirable. Additional car parks could be added later by updating the schedule.

Following the presentation of the report, Members welcomed the proposed Off Street Parking Order and commented that this would support the ongoing redevelopment of Redditch Town Hall.

Questions were raised about whether enforcement action would be undertaken in cases where vehicles parked in electric charging bays when not charging their vehicles. Officers clarified that if vehicles were parked in electric charging bays but were not being charged, enforcement action could be undertaken, as these bays were intended solely for charging purposes. Similarly, enforcement action would be taken in cases where vehicles were parked in

residential parking bays where the vehicles had not been registered for the use of residents.

During consideration of the item, the Leader reminded Members that a parking permit form had recently been circulated for the considered of all elected Members to enable them to register their vehicle's details on the Council's new parking system. Members were urged to return a completed copy of this form to Democratic Services as soon as possible.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Executive note the Council's ability to manage and control its off-street parking environment in the form of implementing this Order;**
- 2) authority be delegated to the Head of Environmental and Housing Property Services and the Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services to take all necessary steps to finalise the draft Order, schedules and car park plans and then publish, consult upon, make and implement an Off Street Parking Order in terms similar to the draft "Redditch Borough Council (Off Street Parking Places) Order 2023" ("the Order"); and**
- 3) authority be delegated to the Head of Environmental and Housing Property Services and Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services to issue any passes or season tickets in accordance with the Order.**

142. HOUSING POLICIES

The Head of Community and Housing Services introduced the Housing Policies report for Members' consideration. Members were advised that changes were proposed to various housing policies in the report to ensure that the Council remained compliant with best practice. There were varying amounts of discretion available to the Council in relation to the content of these housing policies, although there were also a lot of specific legislative requirements that applied to the delivery of Housing Services which the Council needed to comply with.

During consideration of this item, Officers from the Housing Department delivered a presentation that provided further information about the updates to the various housing policies for Members' consideration. In addition, information was provided on the subject of the updated Tenancy Management Policy and Tenancy Management Agreement and Members were advised that, whilst the latter document did not need to be presented, Officers had wanted to consult with Members on the content. The proposed changes to both of these documents would subsequently be subject to consultation in a two-stage process with local tenants and each tenant would be provided with a paper copy of the policy as part of this process.

Once the report had been presented, Members discussed the following points in detail:

- The significant amount of work that had been undertaken by Officers in preparing the report. Members thanked Officers for their hard work in respect of this matter.
- The value of the Council's housing stock in providing social housing to some of the most vulnerable residents in society.
- The increasing demand for social housing in a cost of living crisis.
- The need for the Council to provide support to tenants whilst also protecting and preserving the Council's housing stock.
- The benefits to both tenants and the Council of clarifying the respective rights and obligations of both Council tenants and the Council as landlord.
- The need for the Council to ensure compliance with safety standards for Council properties.
- The arrangements by which Officers could access Council houses where needed, such as to undertake gas maintenance inspections.
- The need to protect Council houses from malicious damage that could be caused by tenants. Members noted that the tenants who caused such damage were in the minority.
- The potential for tenants to be incentivised, where appropriate, to downsize, thereby providing larger properties for the use of families.
- The extent to which tenants would be required to acknowledge receipt of their copy of the Tenancy Management Policy. Officers clarified that copies of the policy would be posted to tenants and tenants would not be required to acknowledge

receipt. A similar approach had been taken at other local authorities and this approach was considered to be reasonable.

- The action that would be taken to ensure that responses received to the consultation in respect of the Tenancy Management Agreement and Tenancy Management Policy were not submitted by the same person from the same IP address multiple times. Officers explained that an email address had been created for consultation purposes and Officers could monitor whether multiple submissions were being received from the same IP address.
- The level of engagement that was anticipated in the consultation process. Officers explained that it was difficult to determine in advance how many responses would be received through consultation and this might vary between the two stages of that process. The Council did not have to consult with a specific proportion of local tenants however, officers were hoping to receive feedback from tenants from a range of demographic backgrounds.
- The need for alternative consultation options to be made available to tenants who did not have access to electronic forms of communication, such as paper copies of the consultation papers. The Executive Committee was advised that a paper copy of the consultation papers could be included in the papers dispatched in the post to tenants.
- The potential for roadshows to take place as part of the consultation process, whereby Officers could meet with tenants face-to-face. Officers advised that this could be included in the consultation process.
- The powers available to the Council to assess the condition of Council houses during the course of a tenancy. Members were informed that there would be annual tenancy audits which would provide an opportunity to identify issues. In addition, staff in the Tenancy team, through their familiarity with their tenants, would be in a position to identify any issues mid-year that needed to be addressed.
- The potential for the Council to require residents to pay a deposit before moving into a Council property and other methods available to the Council to recharge tenants for the costs of causing malicious damage. Officers explained that the various options available to the Council were detailed in the Recharge Policy.

- The potential for residents to be housed in accommodation outside the local authority's boundaries. Officers clarified that the Council did make placements in other local authority areas but the Council continued to have ongoing duties to these residents.
- The temporary accommodation options available to the Council and the implications to the authority of placing residents in bed and breakfast accommodation. The Executive Committee was advised that residents could be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation but legally these placements could only last a maximum of six weeks.
- The potential for some of the Council's existing housing stock to be repurposed to provide temporary accommodation. Members were advised that the Council was already in the process of converting a unit into medium-term temporary accommodation.
- The opportunities available for the Council to work with private sector and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations to provide additional social housing to meet demand. Officers clarified that the Council was involved in a private sector housing project with Cornerstone Housing and had also been working closely with St Basils in respect of providing suitable accommodation to young people at risk of homelessness.
- The potential for the Council to offer content insurance to tenants, which could help in the event of a fire. Officers explained that all tenants were offered the chance to pay for the Council's content insurance when they signed up as tenants, but this could not be made into a mandatory condition of tenancy and some residents chose not to pay for the cover.
- The extent to which photographs of the impact of fire damage might encourage more residents to opt for content insurance and the potential for Council staff to share this with tenants who did not have any coverage. Officers confirmed that photographs could potentially be shared and action to encourage take up of content insurance would be welcome as the number of fires had increased in the Borough since the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The possibility of Redditch Borough Council developing a consultation app that could be used for all consultation exercises undertaken by the authority. Members commented that this could be used to help mitigate against the risks of fraud occurring during consultation.

- The difficulties that could arise where tenants reported that they had not been visited by Council staff when booked to undertake property inspections, particularly where this was contradicted by reports from staff. The Executive Committee was informed that the Council had tracking devices to identify where Council vehicles were located. In the future reminder text messages would be sent to residents about forthcoming appointments, including on the date of the appointments, with messages also sent when operatives arrived at a tenant's property.
- The potential for bereavement training to be provided to staff to enable them to support residents experiencing bereavement in a sensitive manner, including in cases where there were no succession rights available to family members to remain living in a property. Officers explained that they were in the process of attempting to identify bereavement training that could be delivered to Council staff. Members suggested that a couple of staff members could be asked to specialise in providing support to tenants experiencing bereavement under these circumstances.
- The need to house victims of domestic abuse in appropriate accommodation where they could access key facilities, in order to help them manage their lives without needing to make contact with their abusers.

During consideration of this item, Members referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's pre-scrutiny of the Housing Policies report at the meeting that took place on 16th March 2023. Members noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had requested an update in the new municipal year on the outcomes of the consultation process with respect to the Tenancy Management Agreement and Tenancy Management Policy and Members welcomed the contribution of the Committee in this context.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **the following Housing Policies be approved for adoption:**
 - (a) **Tenancy Management Policy**
 - (b) **Housing Revenue Management Policy**
 - (c) **Garage Policy**
 - (d) **Repairs and Maintenance Policy**
 - (e) **Rechargeable Repairs Policy**

- (f) **Equipment and Adaptations Policy**
- (g) **Voids Policy**
- (h) **Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy**
- (i) **Temporary Accommodation Charging Policy; and**

- 2) **delegated authority be given to the Head of Community and Housing Services and/or Head of Environmental and Housing Property, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, to agree any revisions to the Housing Policies following the consultation and in line with any legislative or government guidance updates.**

**143. FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT
QUARTER 3 - 2022/23 (TO FOLLOW)**

The Head of Finance and Customer Services presented the Financial and Performance Monitoring Report for the third quarter of 2023/24.

The projected budget position for the Council, based on figures from Quarter 3 of the financial year, would be £750,000. This represented a £381,000 increase on the £369,000 overspend that had been reported for the end of Quarter 2 and was largely caused by the allocation of a £1,925 pay award to staff, which had been paid in December 2022. In addition to this, there had been increased fuel and fleet maintenance costs during the period.

The Council's budget position would continue to be reviewed; however, this in-year budget forecast reflected the best information available at the time. Members were advised that it was important to note that there were a number of key factors that might impact upon the financial position which were not yet reflected fully within the forecast, including:

- The cost of living crisis and the impact that this might have upon demand for Council services, including the impact of homelessness and bed and breakfast temporary accommodation costs.
- Inflationary increases – general inflation had been running at 10 per cent and would impact upon transport costs, utilities and contracts in particular.

- Ensuring all invoicing was up to date – especially as the Council moved closer to the end of the financial year at the end of March 2023.

A capital programme of £4.1 million had been approved in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2022/23 in March 2022. This had been fully reviewed as part of the MTFP using actual data as at the end of December 2022. Many of the schemes in the capital programme were already in partial delivery in the 2022/23 financial year. The capital programme included the sums not spent in 2022/23 (and 2021/22 by default if schemes originated earlier than 2022/23, as sums had been carried forward from the previous year's final MTFP) to be carried forward into 2023/24.

The budget included Town's Fund grant funding schemes, such as the Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre, improvements to the Town Centre Public Realm and the business case for the Library site, subject to approval of the latter scheme. There was also £294,000 in UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF). Expenditure at Quarter 3 of the 2022/23 financial year was at £1.88 million against the overall 2022/23 capital budget totalling £5.4 million.

A review of the Council's reserves position had been undertaken as part of the MTFP process. At Quarter 2, the General Fund had been impacted by the significant 2022/23 overspend position, which was £1.424 million. This was what was reflected in the MTFP. However, Quarter 3 monitoring set out a significant improvement of this position to a £750,000 overspend and therefore improved the General Fund position to a forecast £2.506 million at 31st March 2026.

The Executive Committee was being asked to approve implementation of the Council Tax Support Fund Policy for 2023/24. The Council was keen to support all eligible taxpayers within the authority's boundaries and, as such, would implement the scheme strictly in accordance with Central Government Guidelines. A reduction of up to £25 would be made to the Council Tax Account of taxpayers who were in receipt of a Council Tax Reduction on 1st April 2023. The reduction in liability would apply to both working age and pension age Council Tax Reduction applicants. When any funds remained after applying for the reduction in liability, the Council would use the funds as part of its Exceptional Hardship

Fund, which assisted low-income taxpayers facing exceptional financial hardship.

The Council was administering the Government's Energy Bill Support Schemes. The Executive Committee was being asked to approve the release of £8,000 from General Fund Reserves to administer the Energy Fund Support Schemes if the Government did not grant New Burdens Funding to cover these costs. Members were advised that although it was highly likely that this funding would be made available, it would be prudent at this stage to plan for the worst-case scenario. Redditch Borough Council was distributing a £19,000 Alternative Fuel Payment Scheme and £250,000 for the Energy Bill Support Scheme Alternative Funding.

The Executive Committee was also being asked to approve amendments to the Dial a Ride and Shopmobility fees and charges. An amendment was highlighted as being necessary to paragraph 3.18 of the report in respect of this matter and Members were advised that this should have recorded the following:

“Officers have been in discussion with the Portfolio Holder for Community Services and Regulatory Services to trial a scheme to support residents in Beoley being able to access services in Redditch. The community transport scheme in Bromsgrove does not have capacity. As part of the trial it is proposed to charge an increased fee to take into account that the bus will have to travel outside of the Borough. The new fee proposed is as below and would only apply to residents on the border with Redditch. The community transport service in Bromsgrove is supportive of this trial. The new fee for Dial A Ride is:

‘Charge for residents outside the Borough’ - to be ‘£1 additional fee to existing charges’.”

An amendment was also requested to the Shopmobility fees and charges relating to ‘the assisted shopping escort service’ and to increase the charge from £2.50 to £12 an hour. This was to support the service to be closer to full cost recovery. The proposed fee was comparable to the Age UK hourly rate for assistance with shopping. The service was keen to promote this service, which historically had not been well advertised to customers.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget, totalling £25.4 million, was approved in March 2022 and funded from rents and

tenants' contributions. The approved HRA capital programme for 2022/23 totalled £14.2 million. As at Quarter 3 of 2022/23, it was forecast that the HRA would outturn with a surplus in the region of £56,000, which was a reduction of £85,000 on the £141,000 figure reported at Quarter 2.

The main variances in the HRA that had contributed to this surplus included:

- Anticipated repairs and maintenance efficiency savings arising from improved work planning and timely delivery of works.
- Vacant posts due to ongoing operational reviews and reduced consultancy/professional fees.
- Increases in arrears especially from former tenants due to economic conditions prevailing and corresponding bad debt adjustments.

As at Quarter 3 of 2022/23, it was forecast that the HRA capital programme budget would outturn with a spend of £10.3 million against a £14.2 million budget. The £3.9 million underspend was primarily as a result of delays in project start dates and changes in assumptions regarding Housing purchases. This was a £200,000 improvement on the Quarter 2 HRA capital position.

The performance report set out to provide data and information that linked all activity back to the Council's strategic purposes as set out in the Council Plan and Council Plan Addendum. It was recognised that effective performance management would enable the Council to use its limited resources in a more targeted manner, maximising the value of Council services and allowing the Council to be even more responsive to customers' needs.

Members subsequently discussed the content of the report and in doing so questioned whether the proposed increase of £1 on the fee for customers who lived outside the Borough using the Dial A Ride service was sufficient. It was noted that this was being proposed in a context in which ongoing roadworks on the Birmingham Road were causing traffic delays and the suggestion was made that the increase could potentially have been higher. Officers suggested that this could be investigated further and it was noted that Members had the power to amend the charge further if considered necessary.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the current financial position in relation to Revenue and Capital Budgets for the period April to December 2022 be noted for both the Council and the HRA;
- 2) the Quarter 3 Performance data for the Period October to December 2022 be noted;
- 3) the updated Redditch Borough Council - Council Tax Support Fund Policy 2023-24 be approved;
- 4) £8,000 be approved to be released from General Fund Reserves to administer the Energy Fund Support Scheme if the Government did not Grant New Burdens Funding to cover these costs; and
- 5) the increases to Dial a Ride and Shopmobility charges be approved.

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

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

145. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

The following verbal 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 the absence of Councillor Lovell, Members noted that there was no update in respect of the Climate Change Cross Party Working Group.

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

Councillor Dormer advised that the following meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Party was scheduled to take place in the 2023/24 municipal year.

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

Members were informed that there was no update on the latest work of the Corporate Parenting Board.

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

The Executive Committee was advised that there was due to be a meeting of the Member Support Steering Group on 22nd March 2023.

- 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.

146. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Members considered the content of the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 2nd February 2023.

During consideration of these minutes, Members queried the reference to the Council's accounts having not yet been submitted and the timeframes in which it was anticipated that this would be resolved. Officers confirmed that this was referring to the Council's 2021/22 accounts and not to the 2020/21 accounts, which had already been submitted to the external auditors.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 2nd February 2023 be noted.