



Council

Monday, 29th January, 2024

MINUTES

Present:

Councillors Salman Akbar (Mayor), Karen Ashley (Deputy Mayor), Imran Altaf, Joe Baker, Juliet Barker Smith, Joanne Beecham, Brandon Clayton, Luke Court, Matthew Dormer, James Fardoe, Peter Fleming, Lucy Harrison, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Chris Holz, Joanna Kane, Sid Khan, Emma Marshall, Kerrie Miles, Timothy Pearman, Jane Spilsbury, Monica Stringfellow, Craig Warhurst and Ian Woodall

Officers:

Peter Carpenter, Nicola Cummings, Claire Felton, Sue Hanley and Guy Revans

Democratic Services Officers:

Jess Bayley-Hill

57. WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all present to the meeting. He announced that the item about Land at Upper Norgrove had been withdrawn from the agenda and would be referred to the Executive Committee meeting on 6th February 2024.

58. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Juma Begum, Alex Fogg, Andy Fry, Anthony Lovell and Gemma Monaco.

59. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Joanna Kane declared an Other Disclosable Interest in minute number 65, Executive Committee, relating to Redditch Planning Enforcement Policy and the Planning and Environmental Enforcement Business Case, as she was a member of Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board.

The following members declared an interest in minute item no. 63, Motions on Notice, in relation to the Motion about Fire Services:

Chair

Councillor Matthew Dormer – in his capacity as a serving fire officer.

Councillors Brandon Clayton and Emma Marshall – in their capacity as members of the Fire Authority.

All three Councillors left the room during consideration of that Motion on Notice and did not take part in the debate or vote thereon.

60. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 5th December 2023 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Mayor.

61. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following announcements were provided at the meeting:

a) The Mayor's Announcements

A list of the Mayor's engagements during December 2023 had been included in the agenda pack for the meeting.

The Mayor announced that it was Councillor Sharon Harvey's birthday and presented her with a bouquet of flowers.

b) The Leader's Announcements

Councillor Matthew Dormer announced that he had attended meetings of the West Midlands Combined Authority Board, Housing Land Delivery and Economic Growth Boards.

c) The Chief Executive's Announcements

The Interim Chief Executive confirmed that she had no announcements on this occasion.

62. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 9)

Four questions on notice had been submitted for this meeting.

Social Value

Councillor Sid Khan asked the Leader: “Can the leader tell us how Redditch Borough Council has factored in Social Value in its contracting and tendering process in accordance with the Social Value Act 2012 for recent and ongoing Redditch Borough Council Regeneration projects?”

The Leader responded “Whilst the Council does not have a formal Social Value policy, Social Value is now considered in every major procurement undertaken. The extent and nature of Social Value included in an individual procurement depend on the specifics of each project.

Social value is scored as part of the quality evaluation on any major procurement. An example of Social Value scored in a recent Redditch Borough Council regeneration project is as follows:

Social Value and support to the Community and Local Businesses

Provide details of how you will ensure the local supply chain, subcontractors and people benefit from this project? How will you monitor local supply chain spend?

What are your quantifiable social value commitments to this project?

Consider how will your company directly improve the local economy, what local jobs will be created and sustained by you to complete the works, what local Bidders will you utilise and what training or apprenticeship schemes will be provided.

What support will be offered to local community organisations to support their development.

What facilities will be provided for use by community groups and voluntary organisations as a direct result of this contract.

What time will be allowed for your employees to volunteer for community work in the local area (Number of hours).

What donations to be made to local community funds to support local causes (value).

What is the total amount (£) to be spent in the local supply chain within the local area through the contract (value per year).

Provide details of support to be provided for local businesses to assist them to survive and grow (Number of hours).”

Councillor Khan asked a supplementary question about what social value the Council had gained for its residents in tangible and monetary terms.

The Leader replied that although no formal policy was in place social value was considered in every major procurement undertaken. He agreed to provide an answer to the detail in the question outside the meeting.

Armed Forces Champion

Councillor Joe Baker asked the Leader “In the public interest can the Leader explain what exactly is the role of the Council’s Armed Forces Champion?”

The Leader replied: “The Armed Forces Champion is appointed by Council at the Annual Council meeting in May.

Our Armed Forces Champion is currently Councillor Fogg and this appointment was made at our AGM as part of the appointment to outside bodies process. We are invited to appoint to the role by Worcestershire County Council’s Armed Forces Covenant Partnership.

The purpose of the role is:

To act as a positive focus for the local community at elected Member level in respect of the Armed Forces Covenant.

The responsibilities are:

- Act as an advocate on behalf of the Armed Forces Covenant within the Council and to the wider community.
- Become an active member of Worcestershire’s Armed Forces Covenant Partnership, working collaboratively with other District Council Champions, officers and stakeholders to improve access to local services to ensure our local armed forces community is not disadvantaged in any way.
- Champion and be a public point of contact for the local armed forces community including serving / reservists / veterans / spouses / families / carers.
- Become familiar with the needs and priorities of the armed forces community in Worcestershire in order to accurately address their needs.
- Act as a conduit between Worcestershire’s Armed Forces Covenant Partnership and the District Council in order to make departments aware of relevant issues and where necessary ensure that the covenant is being implemented as part of the District Council’s commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant.
- To engage with relevant local groups and organisations who support the armed forces community, such as local military charities, voluntary groups, and so on.
- Ensure that officers who have daily contact with the public are aware of the Covenant and understand how it impacts upon local services and delivery.
- Support local activities and events presented by Armed Forces Week and Remembrance Day.

- Promote the Armed Forces Covenant to local businesses and organisations.”

Councillor Baker asked a supplementary question in which he referred to Councillor Sid Khan’s attendance at various events associated with the Armed Forces and asked whether the Leader would thank him for doing so. The Leader replied that he was very appreciative to Councillor Khan for attending the Remembrance Sunday service. However, he was not prepared to comment on Councillor Fogg’s attendance in his absence from the Council meeting.

Public Sector Equality Duty – Play Strategy

Councillor Jane Spilsbury asked the Leader: “Can the Leader explain how the council meets its obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty, particularly in regard to the Play Strategy?”

The Leader replied: “The Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Act) came into force on 5th April 2011. The Equality Duty applies to public bodies and others carrying out public functions. It supports good decision-making by ensuring public bodies consider how different people will be affected by their activities, helping them to deliver policies and services which are efficient and effective, accessible to all, and which meet different people’s needs. The Equality Duty is supported by specific duties, set out in regulations which came into force on 10th September 2011.

All play areas are in locations accessible to all. A range of equipment and opportunity is currently provided.

Regarding the Play Provision Strategy, the important purposes are:

- Sound decision making around our provision both current and proposed.
- Management of our provision in line with strategies, audits, and policies (i.e. Parks, Leisure Culture Strategies / management plans, play audits, inspections).
- How we procure our new sites and improve / refurbish existing, working in line with standards, codes of practices, legal requirements, and the manufacturer’s guidance.
- The services we provide (i.e. play value and accessibility).

To expand on the points above, we make decisions regarding our provision which are based on a competent and thorough inspection regime, staff insight and knowledge, site user feedback, and budget/funding management. We ensure our provision complies

with codes of conduct, professional body/bodies' guidance and that it operates within the set standards.

We have started to undertake strategy recommendations and audit works on our facilities and provisions, to ensure our parks and play provisions continue to be kept to a high standard and deficiencies are addressed.

We regularly consult site users and residents on proposed new play provisions and site refurbishments to ensure we are meeting the users' needs. Frameworks are used to ensure goods and services are sourced in the correct manner.

In relation to inclusivity and disabled access, our play audit/investment strategy has cross referenced play provision accessibility with demographic health data including: Health Deprivation and Disability; Population aged 12 and Under and Child Obesity. This will provide the Council with the opportunity to address deficiencies where reasonable and meet service needs." The Leader explained that he would arrange for relevant website links to be sent to Councillor Spilsbury.

Councillor Spilsbury referred to Matchborough having a high proportion of families with young children living in disadvantaged circumstances and a higher-than-average proportion of adolescents living with obesity, and asked in a supplementary question how these issues were ignored in the decision-making process for the Play Strategy.

The Leader replied that the audit and recommendations were produced by an external body. He suggested that if a Parks Strategy had existed previously, the equipment might have been better maintained over time and there might not have been a need to decommission some facilities. Members were reminded that consultation had taken place.

Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre

Councillor James Fardoe asked the Leader, "Could the Leader of the Council describe, in Layman's terms, what a Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre is?"

The Leader responded that "As set out in the business case dated the 19th August 2021, The Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (DMIC) is a new 2,500m² facility which will provide flexible office and workspace for start-ups as well as providing support to existing manufacturing businesses. The centre seeks to help develop more innovation within the Redditch economy and encourage productivity growth within the manufacturing sector through, in particular, the development of digital and 5G technologies. It will also provide access to advanced equipment

such as 3D printers and offer more opportunities for employees to develop digital skills through on the job learning.

For further context:

The need for the DMIC is driven by a number of key challenges faced by the Redditch economy. The key challenges that it will help to address are:

- An enterprise deficit: Redditch suffers from an enterprise deficit, with a low rate of business startups (44.6 per 100,000 per annum compared to the national average of 60.4 in 2018).
- Low educational attainment: Redditch has poor educational outcomes, and a smaller than average population of individuals educated to degree level (27.8%, 12 percentage points lower than the national average in 2018).
- Aging assets: The town has a wide range of aging assets which reduce the value of the public realm and overall appeal of the town. This includes the current police station, which will be relocated to allow the current site to be demolished ahead of the development of the DMIC.

The DMIC will help tackle these challenges and in so doing will help create a number of new opportunities for Redditch. These opportunities include: retaining more educated young workers; creating more innovation through the provision of a clear focal point in the town; improving digital and 5G connectivity; and increasing employability through the provision of a higher level of digital skills.”

Councillor Fardoe asked a supplementary question, “How many companies and businesses have shown an active interest in using the space and facilities provided by the DMIC?”

The Leader replied that the Council had spoken to local estate agents who had confirmed that there was unmet demand for office space, startups and commercial space in Redditch which were not being fulfilled. Ageing buildings and improving educational attainment were a challenge. There was a 30% manufacturing base in Redditch, but it did not feature in education and the DMIC aimed to address this. The Leader offered to arrange a visit to the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Institute of Technology which would give an insight into what was trying to be achieved in the DMIC.

63. MOTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 11)

The Mayor advised that three Motions on Notice had been received for this meeting.

Post 16 Education

Councillor Jane Spilsbury submitted the following Motion for consideration:

“In light of Osprey House being repurposed, I move that Redditch Borough Council seek guarantees from Worcestershire county council that the quality and breadth of the post-16 education offer in Redditch is at least maintained, and ideally, enhanced to address the needs of school leavers and adult learners, as well as addressing the needs of the local economy.”

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Spilsbury referred to the current provision for post 16 education across the town. She reported that Sixth form provision was thriving and there was a broad and balanced offer at A-level. In the past Osprey House had offered level 4 and beyond provision via Heart of Worcestershire (HOW) College. In the light of Osprey House being repurposed, she was concerned that degree level education would no longer be provided in Redditch, especially in disciplines such as social work and education. It appeared that only one level 4 course would be offered by HOW College, in Therapeutic Counselling. Councillor Spilsbury acknowledged that the Borough Council was not responsible for education provision in the town, but suggested it was in a position to influence provision via the County Council.

Councillor Sid Khan seconded the Motion. He referred to the regression in the levels of education available in Redditch which increased the potential for young people to get into debt if they had to leave to complete their studies. Enhancing the post 16 education provision would increase the intellectual capital in the local population.

The main points raised during the debate were:

- Worcestershire County Council was not responsible for post 16 education, it was the responsibility of HOW College.
- The Leader offered to raise this issue at one of his regular meetings with the Principal of the College who he considered was receptive to the need for change.
- There would potentially be access to resources via regional funding, so it was important that the Council pursued this issue with other authorities, including the West Midlands Combined Authority.
- Retaining in Redditch the ability to learn at degree level was important in enabling access to a wide range of the population as an alternative to leaving the Borough to attend University.

Councillor Craig Warhurst proposed an amendment, that the issue was tackled via a Short Sharp review. This would enable the relevant organisations to be approached for input whilst reflecting the concerns expressed by Councillors. The amendment was seconded by Councillor Joanne Beecham and was accepted by the proposer, so became the substantive motion.

During discussion of the Motion the following points were made;

- Work was being undertaken by the County Council and partners to achieve a smoother transition between children's and adults' services.
- The statistics on educational achievement quoted earlier in the meeting formed the basis of a case for improvement and to raise the aspirations of young people in the town.
- Adult learning was also important for those learning in later adult life.

RESOLVED that

In light of Osprey House being repurposed, Redditch Borough Council undertake a Short Sharp review into the quality and breadth of the post-16 education offer in Redditch so it is at least maintained, and ideally, enhanced to address the needs of school leavers and adult learners, as well as addressing the needs of the local economy.

Proposed Cuts to Local Fire Services

Councillors Brandon Clayton, Matt Dormer and Emma Marshall declared an interest in this item and left the room prior to its discussion and determination.

Councillor Sharon Harvey submitted the following motion for consideration:

“As community leaders, this council opposes the proposed cuts to local Fire Services, which will leave Redditch with only 2 fire engines and calls on Herefordshire and Worcestershire Fire and Rescue Authority to reconsider their proposal.”

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Harvey referred to a recent consultation on proposals to reduce the number of engines across Herefordshire and Worcestershire. In the proposals the three engines currently based in Redditch would be reduced to two. She believed the proposals put the community at risk and that the reduced capacity represented cuts disguised as efficiencies. There were huge financial costs to the community from fire, in terms of housing, lost business and emotional impact. Councillor Harvey

gave examples of the deployment of the third engine at Redditch for incidents including an explosion and flooding. A reduction in the number of engines also risked the availability for large events where engines were called from other stations to assist. The consultation document itself was large and could dissuade people from responding as it was difficult to navigate.

Councillor Joe Baker seconded the Motion.

Councillor Craig Warhurst proposed an amendment, to add the following to the Motion:

“The Council should submit a formal, cross-party response to the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Fire Authority’s Resource Review Public Consultation.

A paper is requested from the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Fire and Rescue Authority setting out the rationale behind cutting the service, with risk-based data to be included.

Clarification is requested from Herefordshire and Worcestershire Fire and Rescue Authority about how many calls could have been made had the third fire engine been available 24/7, fully crewed.”

Councillor Harvey accepted the additions and the amended Motion became the substantive motion. The following points were made during debate on the motion:

- It was important to retain capacity not only for the town but to enable cross county and cross border assistance to be offered; if only two engines were available then it would leave the town exposed if one was called away in such circumstances.
- Councillors had an important role in widening understanding about the proposals since the consultation document was large and complex.
- The increase in the population of the Borough as a result of development meant that a third engine was necessary.
- Any delay in response times due to shortage of engines risked lives.
- Redditch currently had 13 firefighters compared to 17 in 2021 and 950 hours per week were available compared to 1,350.

RESOLVED that

- 1) As community leaders, this Council opposes the proposed cuts to local Fire Services, which will leave Redditch with only 2 fire engines and calls on**

Herefordshire and Worcestershire Fire and Rescue Authority to reconsider their proposal

- 2) The Council should submit a formal, cross-party response to the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Fire Authority's Resource Review Public Consultation**
- 3) A paper is requested from the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Fire and Rescue Authority setting out the rationale behind cutting the service, with risk-based data to be included, and**
- 4) Clarification is requested from Herefordshire and Worcestershire Fire and Rescue Authority about how many calls could have been made had the third fire engine been available 24/7, fully crewed.**

Promotion of Council Events

Councillor Juliet Barker Smith submitted the following Motion:

"This council calls on the Executive Committee to review the public communication system designed to promote Council events with a view to making improvements to its operation."

In proposing the motion, Councillor Barker Smith explained that the purpose of it was to enhance good practice. She had heard of instances recently where people had commented that they were not aware of events in the town. She suggested that communication by the Council should focus on addressing the challenges of:

- Some people being disenfranchised as they did not use the internet.
- The number of free publications which carried details of events were no longer delivered widely across the Borough.
- More efficient communication of events would aim to increase footfall and support the economy.

Councillor Barker Smith referred to the Council's communication strategy which set out its aims to reach as wide an audience as possible. She suggested various ways in which current communications could be improved, including use of noticeboards.

Councillor Joanna Kane seconded the motion. In doing so, she referred to encouraging a wide range of input and ideas for improving the reach of Council publicity for events. She acknowledged that budget availability was a challenge and sponsorship and partnerships might be a realistic alternative for consideration by the Executive Committee.

During the debate the following points were raised:

- Recent communications about the brown bins showed the innovative approach to communications which had been adopted by the Council.
- The lack of easy access to free newspapers was a challenge.
- The use of noticeboards was supported but they were not always well used.

Clarity was sought about the events to be covered by the Motion, as the Council arranged fewer directly than it had previously. Councillor Emma Marshall suggested that the Motion should refer to Borough-wide events rather than Council events. Councillor Joe Baker proposed this as an amendment, and Councillor Sid Khan seconded it. Councillor Barker Smith agreed to the amendment and it became the substantive motion.

The main points made during debate of the motion were:

- The Council worked in partnership to support events and it was important for people to find out what was going on.
- The use of digital noticeboards might enable wider publicity.
- The Discover app, funded by the Business Improvement District (BID), promoted events in the town and this might be enhanced and promoted.
- Publicity about the light trail reached 42,000 people on social media and the calibre of event offered would help attract people.
- Engaging with people who did not use social media was a challenge.
- Advertising on the side of buses could reach a different audience and the Kingfisher Shopping Centre could be approached about using their noticeboard for appropriate events, although this might involve a cost. Other screens were located in public buildings such as leisure centres.
- Residents and community associations might be able to help reach those who didn't access the usual methods.
- The Council had an excellent calendar of civic events, which should be shared and spoken about with one voice.
- School newsletters were possibly a vehicle to reach residents across the Borough.

RESOLVED that

this Council calls on the Executive Committee to review the public communication system designed to promote Borough-

wide events with a view to making improvements to its operation.

64. OUTCOMES OF THE CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

The Leader presented the Corporate Peer Challenge progress report and proposed the recommendations.

The Leader reported that the update set out progress against the 6 key recommendations from March 2023 and reflected the continued good working relationship with Bromsgrove District Council, a recognition of the Council's review of its strategic objectives and revised priorities agreed in November 2023, and support for developing and bringing forward the Council's vision and priorities during 2024. It also referred to a strong purpose and direction in the management team and progress with improving decision making in the Council, although some members had raised issues about the provision of information and delivery of improved member to member and member – officer relations. Officers were prioritising the workforce strategy and the huge steps made in addressing the section 24 notice had been noted. The peer team was pleased to note the Council was taking the right and necessary steps. The Leader had been encouraged by their feedback.

Councillor Brandon Clayton seconded the recommendation and spoke in favour of carrying out the challenge as a benchmark for the action the Council was taking. The process would be ongoing to aim for continuing improvement.

Points raised during the debate included:

- The process was important in that there was feedback from peers who were external to the Council, but it was suggested some issues raised with the peer reviewers were not included in the report.
- Officers had worked very hard to address some of the issues raised in the first peer review report, especially the financial issues, but it was suggested that the reviewers were not in a position to comment on these as the audited accounts had not been signed off.

RESOLVED that

the report in respect of the outcomes of the Corporate Peer Challenge progress review from the Local Government Association peers be noted, and thereafter published on the Council's website.

65. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Members considered recommendations that had been agreed at the meetings of the Executive Committee held on 5th December 2023 and 9th January 2024.

Finance and Performance Quarter 2 Report 2023/24

Council considered bringing forward a capital sum to improve the resilience of the Council's IT system for dealing with cyber security.

Redditch Borough Council Planning Enforcement Policy

The Council's Enforcement Policy had been updated in accordance with national guidance, best enforcement practice and to provide greater clarity and transparency on expectations, processes and limitations in relation to the Council's role. Members spoke in support of the new Policy and the Leader commended the flow chart in the Policy for setting out the process involved.

Council Tax Base and Non-Domestic Rates Yield

The Council considered details of the calculation of the tax base for council tax setting purposes. The calculation of the council tax base was required as part of the determination of the council tax for 2024/25.

Council Tax – Discretionary Council Tax Reduction Policy – Council Section 13A1(C) Policy

The Council had the power under The Local Government Finance Act 1992 (LGFA '92) to reduce the amount of council tax that a person was liable to pay. The section 13A(1)(C) power could be exercised on a case-by-case basis or by determining a class of case in which the liability would be reduced.

Examples of where the Council exercised the discretionary power included providing a discount to Worcestershire County Council care leavers resident within the district and following a severe weather event such as flooding.

Council Tax Empty Homes Discounts and Premiums

Council Tax was introduced on 1st April 1993 and from this date until 1st April 2004 dwellings in England which were unoccupied were eligible for a council tax discount of 50%.

A series of amendments to council tax legislation, made since 2004, had given billing authorities the power to reduce or remove the

discount for unoccupied dwellings and, in the case of long-term empty homes, to impose a council tax premium. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 had introduced further changes to the discount and premiums for unoccupied homes, the main one being to reduce the length of time, from 2 years to 1 year, the period for which a dwelling must be vacant before it was classed as a long-term empty dwelling. Billing authorities also had discretion to apply premiums up to 100%.

The amendment to the legislation meant that, from 1st April 2024, the premium would be applied to all dwellings that had been vacant for 12 months or more. Members spoke in favour of the approach as being a tool to encourage homes being brought back into use.

The meeting was adjourned at 21.06 and resumed at 21.18.

Final Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2024-25

The Council was required by the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to make a council tax reduction scheme specifying the reductions in council tax that would be provided to people who were in financial need, or to classes of people who were in general in financial need. When a scheme had been made the Council must, for each tax year, consider whether to revise or replace its scheme.

The Council introduced a new income banded scheme for working age applicants with effect from 1st April 2021. The rationale for the new scheme was to ensure that it was future proofed, and it reduced the administrative burden placed on the Council by the introduction of universal credit.

The existing scheme included a provision for the uprating of income bands by an inflation factor decided by the Council. The autumn statement increased national welfare benefits by 6.7% and it was recommended that the income bands within the Council's scheme were also adjusted by this amount.

Housing Revenue Account Rent Setting 2024/25

The Council considered a proposal to increase housing rent by an average of 7%, which was below the maximum allowed of 7.7%.

Councillor Craig Warhurst, the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement, reported that, given the pressures from the rising cost of living, the Council had tried to mitigate the level of increase in rents. However, it was felt necessary to increase rents in order to continue to invest in improving the housing stock. Inflation in the building sector had led to increased costs in the improvements being made.

Some Members spoke against the proposed increase in rent, referring to a surplus in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) which had built up during the Covid pandemic. The view was expressed that it was not an appropriate time to increase the rent as many people were struggling with the costs of living. Whilst financial support was provided for certain tenants, not all were eligible for this. It was also suggested that repairs still needed to be carried out and this undermined the case for increasing the rent.

However, it was suggested that for the majority of tenants the increase in rent would be met by Government support.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement referred in his response to the Council building houses and improvements made to the existing stock as well as to efforts being made to achieve a balanced budget.

Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-25 to 2026-7 - Tranche 1 (following consultation)

The Council set its budget in two Tranches. The initial Tranche had been published in the Autumn of 2023.

The initial Tranche sought to close as much of the deficit as possible using information known as at the end of September 2023 and sought approval for those savings to be implemented. Having a second Tranche after the Christmas break, for which approval would be sought in February, would take account of the Local Government Settlement.

During consideration of this item, a Member complimented the Finance team for their work on the budget and the Portfolio Holder for his constructive engagement with the Audit and Governance Committee. However, it was suggested that the Council was at risk of having unaudited accounts at the end of the current financial year. The view was also expressed that some of the fees and charges were proposed to increase disproportionately, especially for Dial a Ride. It was suggested that it was unlikely the Council would benefit from the additional Government Grant that had recently been announced since this was aimed to support social care, which was not a Council function. It was suggested that a task and finish group should be used to monitor the Council's finances on a regular basis.

With reference to the Dial a Ride charges, the proposal to reduce the registration fee from £16.50 to £15 was highlighted. Other schemes charged an administration fee per journey. It was suggested that the service would still represent good value for

money and supported tackling social isolation. However, it was also argued that the benefit of the reduction in the administration fee would not be felt by users of the service beyond two journeys.

In response to a query from a member, the Section 151 Officer confirmed that the draft budget had been prepared with the background of the Council having 3 years of unaudited accounts. For context, he reported that there were approximately two thirds of Councils across the country who had 2 years of unaudited accounts.

Planning and Environmental Enforcement Business Case

A business case had been prepared to consider the benefit in bringing together enforcement functions from Bromsgrove and Redditch Council services with those already within Worcestershire Regulatory Services to deliver a quality service to all customers. It aimed to identify where service delivery could be improved through prioritisation, standardisation and resilience.

Members spoke in support of the proposals and the view was expressed that a more robust approach would encourage people to go through the proper process.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meetings of the Executive Committee held on 5th December 2023 and 9th January 2024 be received and all recommendations adopted.

66. REGULATORY COMMITTEES

The Council considered the proposals from the Licensing Committee to designate all current and future streets as consent streets for the purposes of street trading.

RESOLVED that

- a) the draft resolution reported to the Licensing Committee on 27th November 2023 be passed, and**
- b) officers be authorised to publish notice that the resolution has been passed in accordance with the requirements of Schedule 4 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982.**

67. URGENT BUSINESS - RECORD OF DECISIONS

The Mayor advised that there had not been any urgent decisions since the last meeting of the Council.

68. URGENT BUSINESS - POLITICAL BALANCE

The Mayor agreed to consideration of this item as urgent in order that the change to the political balance of the Council and actions arising from this could be agreed promptly.

The Council considered a report which set out a proposed revised political balance of the Council following the resignation of Councillor Kerrie Miles from the Labour Group.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Political balance of the Committees of the Council be agreed.**
- 2) the arrangement where the seats on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are not allocated in accordance with the political balance requirements be continued; and**
- 3) appointments by political group leaders to the places on each Committee be noted.**

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.53 pm