

## MINUTES

### Present:

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

### Officers:

Peter Carpenter, Claire Felton and Sue Hanley.

### Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill.

### 69. WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all present to the meeting.

### 70. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Joanne Beecham, Juma Begum, Alex Fogg, and Chris Holtz.

### 71. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

### 72. MINUTES

#### RESOLVED that

**The minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2024 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Mayor.**

## 73. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following announcements were provided at the meeting:

### a) The Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor announced that as this was the last Council meeting of the Municipal Year he wished to thank all Councillors for their service to Redditch and wished all well in the forthcoming elections. He also thanked the officers for their support throughout the year.

### b) The Leader's Announcements

The Leader announced that he had attended a number of meetings including the West Midlands Combined Authority and the Economic Development and Housing Land Delivery Boards.

The Leader also announced that Councillor Joanne Beecham had stood down as Portfolio Holder for Leisure due to personal commitments and he thanked her for her work in that role. The Leader would now be the point of contact for that portfolio .

### c) The Chief Executive's Announcements

The Interim Chief Executive confirmed that she did not have any announcements on this occasion.

## 74. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Members considered recommendations from meetings of the Executive Committee on 6th February 2024 and held immediately prior to the Council meeting. The Mayor explained that the proposed changes to the budget for the Parking SLA and the Termination of the North Worcestershire Economic Development Service had been incorporated into the Tranche 2 Medium Term Financial Plan and the recommendations on these items would be debated as part of the debate on the budget.

### Carbon Reduction Strategy – Annual Review

The Council considered a report on progress with the Carbon Reduction Strategy which had been adopted following the Council declaring a climate emergency in 2022.

During consideration of the report Councillors welcomed the progress made with the actions and the development of an

accessible dashboard to measure performance. They also thanked the officers involved for their work in supporting the Council's actions.

On being put to the vote, the recommendations were declared carried.

### Non-Domestic Rates – Discretionary Rate Relief Policy

Council considered an updated policy for Discretionary Rate Relief. The policy had been amended following the Non-Domestic Rating Act 2023, which had removed the previous restriction on backdating relief for any period beginning on or after 1st April 2023 and revocation of associated Regulations. Local authorities would have full flexibility on the award, backdating and revocation of discretionary rate relief from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

The revised policy defined the circumstances in which backdating of relief would be considered and when awards of discretionary relief would be revoked.

On being put to the vote, the recommendation was declared carried.

### Pay Policy 2024/25

As required by the Localism Act the Council considered its Pay Policy for 2025/25.

The Statement set out policies relating to the remuneration of its chief officers, the remuneration of its lowest-paid employees, and the relationship between the remuneration of its chief officers, and the remuneration of its employees who were not chief officers.

On being put to the vote the recommendation was declared carried.

### Medium Term Financial Plan (Including Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision and Investment Strategy (Tranche Two) Including the Parking Enforcement Service Level Agreement and Termination of Shared Service Arrangement; North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented and proposed recommendations in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2026/27 together with the Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision. Council also considered recommendations relating to the Parking Enforcement Service Level Agreement and Termination

of Shared Service Arrangement: North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration. Updated fees and charges for Licensing functions had been circulated separately to the report for Councillors' consideration.

The Council set its budget in two tranches. The initial tranche was published in the autumn and options were approved at Council in January. The second tranche was now being considered following receipt of the final Local Government settlement figures.

Following tranche 1 of the budget there was an overall budget pressure of £353k in the 2024/25 financial year reducing to a deficit of £93k and then £72k in the following two years. The financial settlement had since allowed opportunities for additional funding, including:

- Increasing the Council tax from 1.99% to 2.99%
- Increasing planning fees for small applications by 25% and other applications by 35%, and
- Additional grant funding of £244k due to the overall Local Government Settlement

In addition, £250k could be released from the budget at tranche 1 and the relevant reserve since the implications of the pay award had been worked through.

Additional pressures of £261k needed to be accounted for. These included:

- £40k for an increase in staffing numbers in Worcestershire Regulatory Services due to higher levels of Food Safety Compliance testing.
- £45k for Planning and Enforcement to address previous issues with recruitment difficulties by engaging Worcestershire Regulatory Services to provide effective enforcement on behalf of the Council.
- Play audits and Investment Strategy starting at £10k rising to £50k, as approved by Executive Committee in January 2024.
- £71k for the Housing Strategy Review to employ private sector housing officers to support increased statutory duties associated with damp and mould issues and implementing the new duties and responsibilities in the Renters Reform Bill.
- Following the withdrawal of Wyre Forest District Council from the current North Worcestershire economic development and regeneration shared service, £72k was earmarked for setting up a new Regeneration and Economic Development Service.

Over the next 3 years £3m was due to be added to the Council's reserves. The Council's General fund was also due to increase to £4m by 2027 because of changes in the allocation of different types of reserve. This was approximately 10% of gross expenditure, above the 5% recommended as sustainable by the Government.

The Housing Revenue Account revenue expenditure was proposed to increase from £28m to £31m by 2027/28 and included an annual capital programme of £10m.

It was proposed to freeze Council tax in 2025/26 to recognise financial pressures faced by residents.

Councillor Matthew Dormer seconded the proposal.

During consideration of this item Councillor Joe Baker proposed an alternative budget on behalf of the Labour Group, which was based on the end point of the Administration's budget and assumed a Council Tax of 2.99% in 2024/25 with a proposed Council Tax freeze being maintained in 2025/26 if affordable. The alternative budget proposed the following:

- Reintroduction of the Street Market in Redditch, a capital cost of £5k a year over 20 years and net running costs of £33k - £38k in total.
- Retain the existing library building and convert it to provide catering and business units on the ground floor with community use, dining and conference facilities on the upper floors. Depending on scope of delivery this might fall within the £4.2m budget.
- Remove the increase charge from dial a ride which would be an additional cost of £18k in 2024/25 and for the three years of the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- Redevelop the grass area of the Forge Mill to enable small stalls to be erected for craft business. The preferred option for this would cost £21.4k per year.
- These proposals would leave a surplus in the budget by the 2026/27 financial year of £20,600.

In proposing the alternative budget Councillor Baker referred to

- The proposals for the library building being able to be worked up into a robust business case. The proposals would act as a catalyst for the rejuvenation of the town centre and would increase footfall. As a community hub it would support the public and businesses and provide facilities for more 'dwell' time as visitors would spend longer in the Town. Business

leaders favoured the provision of a space to hold conferences and other events.

- The alternative budget would support those less fortunate in society by not increasing the dial a ride cost.

The alternative budget was seconded by Councillor Ian Woodall.

During debate on the amendment the following were the main points made:

- The reintroduction of the street market in the town centre would contradict the work of the BID which was reintroducing a market in March 2024.
- The proposal to introduce events at Forge Mill would encourage development of cultural activity in the Borough.
- Although it was the accountable body for finance, the Council was one member of the Town's Board so any changes to proposals for the library building could not be guaranteed to be achieved.
- The proposal to include business innovation at the library building potentially duplicated the development of a business innovation centre at the former Police Station in the town.
- The proposals would encourage the development of local entrepreneurship rather than bring in businesses based outside the Borough.
- In response to a member question regarding the status of contracts regarding the library building, the S151 Officer reported that the original Seddons contract for stage 4 RIBA design was signed off in October 2023 and there would be an updated costs schedule shortly. The agreement to lease with the County Council was due to be signed in the next week.
- A member suggested that the proposal to retain the library building offered the opportunity to keep the Redditch archives in the town, subject to consultation with the County Council. Members also referred to not demolishing the building supporting the Council's carbon reduction target.
- The view was expressed that as a valued service that the dial a ride service should be made more sustainable financially and reducing the charges would not help achieve this. However, it was suggested that residents relied on the service for attending medical appointments and the current charges should be retained.
- If pursued, the proposal to use the grass area at Forge Mill would need to be agreed with Rubicon Leisure Limited who ran the facility on behalf of the Council.
- The view was expressed that the proposals strengthened the town centre's viability and vitality and offered coworking spaces for small businesses.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, the alternative budget was subject to a named vote.

Members voting FOR the alternative budget:

Councillors Joe Baker, Juliet Barker Smith, James Fardoe, Andy Fry, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Joanna Kane, Sid Khan, Jane Spilsbury, Monica Stringfellow and Ian Woodall (11)

Members voting AGAINST the alternative budget:

Councillors Salman Akbar, Imran Altaf, Karen Ashley, Brandon Clayton, Luke Court, Matthew Dormer, Peter Fleming, Lucy Harrison, Anthony Lovell, Emma Marshall, Kerrie Miles, Gemma Monaco, Timothy Pearman and Craig Warhurst (14).

Members ABSTAINING in the vote:

No Councillors (0).

The vote on the alternative budget was therefore lost.

The Council then considered the content of the Medium Term Financial Plan recommendations from the Executive Committee. Points discussed included:

- the impact of inflation on the budget on an ongoing basis, especially relating to the cost of borrowing to fund the capital programme.
- In relation to the Housing Revenue Account the view was expressed that it did not include provision to address poor conditions such as damp and mould nor to increase the effectiveness of housing repairs. It was argued that there was a sum in the budget for resources to undertake a statutory housing review which would include dealing with damp and mould and to support new duties relating to the condition of the private and social housing stock.
- It was reported that the decision made by the County Council to move the archives out of Redditch Library was not related to the decision to demolish the library building.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, the budget proposal was subject to a named vote.

Members voting FOR the proposal:

Councillors Salman Akbar, Imran Altaf, Karen Ashley, Brandon Clayton, Luke Court, Matthew Dormer, Peter Fleming, Lucy Harrison, Anthony Lovell, Emma Marshall, Gemma Monaco, Timothy Pearman and Craig Warhurst (13)

Members voting AGAINST the proposal:

Councillors Joe Baker, Juliet Barker-Smith, James Fardoe, Andy Fry, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Joanna Kane, Sid Khan, Jane Spilsbury, Monica Stringfellow and Ian Woodall (11)

Members ABSTAINING from the vote:

Councillor Kerrie Miles (1)

The proposal was declared carried.

## Council Tax Resolutions

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Executive Committee's recommendations on the Council Tax, which had been considered at a meeting immediately prior to the Council meeting. It was noted that the figure for the total precept in the table at paragraph 3.2 of the report should read £57,455,983.08m instead of £56,455,983.08m.

The recommendations were seconded by Councillor Matthew Dormer.

During consideration of the recommendations a member queried why the precept from Feckenham Parish Council had increased by 200%. Councillor Dormer responded that the precept from the Parish Council had been low for some time and the increase reflected its desire to progress certain initiatives.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, the Council Tax proposal was subject to a named vote.

Members voting FOR the proposal:

Councillors Salman Akbar, Imran Altaf, Joe Baker, Juliet Barker-Smith, Karen Ashley, Brandon Clayton, Luke Court, Matthew Dormer, James Fardoe, Peter Fleming, Andy Fry, Lucy Harrison, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Joanna Kane, Sid Khan, Anthony Lovell, Emma Marshall, Kerrie Miles, Gemma Monaco, Timothy



Pearman, Jane Spilsbury, Monica Stringfellow, Craig Warhurst and Ian Woodall (25)

Members voting AGAINST the proposal: (0)

Members ABSTAINING from the vote: (0)

## **RESOLVED that**

- 1) **The minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2024 be received and all recommendations adopted.  
The following be approved:**
- 2) **The additional funding to the Council as per the Local Government Settlement on the 18<sup>th</sup> December 2023, including the estimated levels for 2024/5 and 2025/6.**
- 3) **The Tranche 2 growth and savings proposals, as set out in Sections 3.27 – 3.35, including an increase of Council Tax of 2.99% for 2024/5.**
- 4) **A proposed Council Tax Freeze in 2025/6, subject to financial requirements allowing this to be possible.**
- 5) **The updated five year Capital Programme 2024/5 to 2028/29 along with its ongoing revenue costs.**
- 6) **The levels of Earmarked Reserve being carried forward into future years.**
- 7) **The level of General Fund balances following additions from the 2024/5 MTFP.**
- 8) **The HRA budget as set out in Sections 3.48 to 3.55.**
- 9) **Members take account of any feedback from the Tranche 2 consultation process undertaken.**
- 10) **The calculation for the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2024/25 (excluding Parish precepts) as £7,094,467.10.**
- 11) **That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2024/25 in accordance with sections 31 to 36 of the Act:**
  - (a) **£49,227,739.00 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (2) of the Act**

(taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils) (*i.e.*, *Gross expenditure*)

- (b) £42,133,272.00 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) of the Act. (*i.e.*, *Gross income*)
- (c) £7,094,467.10 being the amount by which the aggregate of 1.2.2(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 1.2.2(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A (4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act).
- (d) £271.86 being the amount at 1.2.2 (c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (1.1(a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish precepts).
- (e) £60,000 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Feckenham Parish precept) referred to in Section 34 (1) of the Act.
- (f) £269.58 being the amount at 1.2.2 (d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 1.2.2 (e) above by Item T (1.1 (a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34 (2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish precept relates.
- (g) £427.35 being the amount given by adding to the amount at 1.2.2(f), the amount of the special item relating to the Parish of Feckenham 1.2.2(e), divided by the amount in 1.1(b) above.
- (h) The amounts below given by multiplying the amounts at 1.2.2(f) and 1.2.2(g) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band, divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in Band D,

calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwelling listed in different valuation bands.

Valuation Band	Proportion of Band D Paid	Feckenham Parish Council Precept £	Parish of Feckenham Total £	All other parts of the Council £
A	6/9	105.18	284.90	179.72
B	7/9	122.71	332.38	209.67
C	8/9	140.24	379.87	239.63
D	1.00	157.77	427.35	269.58
E	11/9	192.83	522.32	329.49
F	13/9	227.89	617.28	389.39
G	15/9	262.95	712.25	449.30
H	18/9	315.54	854.70	539.16

- 12) It be noted that for the year 2024/25, Worcestershire County Council, Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia and Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority have issued precepts to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 for each category of dwelling in the Council's area as indicated below:

	Valuation Bands							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Worcestershire County Council	1025.95	1196.94	1367.93	1538.92	1880.90	2222.88	2564.87	3077.84
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia	185.00	215.83	246.67	277.50	339.17	400.83	462.50	555.00
Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority	64.81	75.62	86.42	97.22	118.82	140.43	162.03	194.44

13) That having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at 1.2.2(h) and 1.2.3 above, that Redditch Borough Council in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 hereby sets the amounts shown below as the amounts of Council Tax for 2024/25. for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings:

Valuation Band	Proportion of Band D Paid	Parish of Feckenham Total £	All other parts Precepts £
A	6/9	1,560.66	1,455.48
B	7/9	1,820.77	1,698.06
C	8/9	2,080.89	1,940.65
D	1.00	2,340.99	2,183.22
E	11/9	2,861.21	2,668.38
F	13/9	3,381.42	3,153.53
G	15/9	3,901.65	3,638.70
H	18/9	4,681.98	4,366.44

14) That the Interim Director of Finance be authorised to make payments under Section 90(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 from the Collection Fund by ten equal instalments between April 2024 to March 2025 as detailed below:

	Precept £	Deficit on Collection Fund £	Total to pay £
Worcestershire County Council	40,499,912.00	(523,331.44)	39,976,580.06
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia	7,302,995.25	(94,435.15)	7,208,560.10
Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority	2,558,548.43	(33,705.20)	2,524,843.23

15) That the Interim Director of Finance be authorised to make transfers under Section 97 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 from the Collection Fund to the General Fund the sum of £7,060,742.33 being the Council's own demand on the Collection Fund (£7,094,467.10) and Parish

**Precept (£60,000) and the distribution of the deficit on the Collection Fund (-£93,724.77).**

**16) That the Interim Director of Finance be authorised to make payments from the General Fund to Feckenham Parish Council the sums listed above (£60,000) by instalment after 1 April 2024 in respect of the precept levied on the Council.**

**17) The above resolutions to be signed by the Chief Executive for use in legal proceedings in the Magistrates Court for the recovery of unpaid Council Taxes.**

**18) Notices of the making of the said Council Taxes signed by the Chief Executive are given by advertisement in the local press under Section 38(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.**

## **75. URGENT BUSINESS - RECORD OF DECISIONS**

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

## **76. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)**

The Mayor advised that there was one item of urgent business for the meeting, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2023/24. This meeting of the Council was the last in the current Municipal Year at which to consider the report.

Councillor Sid Khan, the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee presented the report. In doing so he thanked the members of the Committee for their dedicated work during the year and the Democratic Services Team for their support. Other Councillors echoed his thanks including members of the Executive who referred to the constructive way in which the Chairs of the Committee and its sub Groups had engaged with them.

Councillor Khan summarised the work of the Committee during the year which included scrutiny of Executive Committee items such as the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan, Worcestershire Housing Strategy 2040 and Establishment of a Programme Office. The Budget and Performance Scrutiny Working Groups had played an active role in pre-scrutinising finance and budget related reports.

Councillor Khan reported that at 28<sup>th</sup> January 2024, 6 of the 9 recommendations made by Scrutiny bodies had been accepted by the Executive and 11 of 15 recommendations made to all Committees.

**RESOLVED that**

**The Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24 be noted.**

Immediately prior to the close of the meeting the Leader of the Council and Leader of the Labour Group thanked all the Councillors for their work in their communities and in supporting the governance of the Council.

The Meeting commenced at 7.01 pm  
and closed at 9.18 pm