



Executive Committee

Tuesday, 31st October,
2023

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), Councillor Gemma Monaco (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Brandon Clayton, Luke Court, Lucy Harrison and Craig Warhurst

Also Present:

Councillors Juma Begum, Sharon Harvey, Jane Spilsbury and Monica Stringfellow

Officers:

Peter Carpenter, Nicola Cummings, Sue Hanley, Michelle Howell and Guy Revans

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

38. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Joe Baker, Joanne Beecham and Bill Hartnett.

39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

40. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader advised that at the latest meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 26th October 2023, Members had considered and endorsed the proposals in the Garden Waste Collection report, which was also due to be considered at the Executive Committee meeting. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee was thanked for the time Members of the Committee took to pre-scrutinise this report.

41. GARDEN WASTE SERVICE

The acting Executive Director of Environment, Leisure and Community Services presented a report proposing the introduction of a Garden Waste Collection Service for the Council.

Members were advised that there had been a garden waste collection service in the Borough for a number of years but this had been delivered by Bromsgrove District Council on behalf of Redditch Borough Council. Originally, it had been intended that this would be a short-term temporary arrangement and the plan had been to introduce an inhouse Garden Waste Collection service at some point. However, there had been a delay in making a decision on this subject due to the uncertainty surrounding the implications of the Environment Act for local authorities and the associated financial implications, particularly as it had been suggested that Councils might need to provide a garden waste collection service free of charge. More recently, the Government had confirmed that local authorities would be permitted to continue to charge for local garden waste collection services and the Council had concluded that it would be timely to consider introducing this service in Redditch.

The garden waste collection service proposed for Redditch Borough Council would operate for 40 weeks in the year. By providing this service inhouse, it was anticipated that the Council would be able to increase the number of residents in the Borough who could register to receive the service. By contrast, under existing arrangements, there was a threshold beyond which the Council could not increase customer numbers and there were residents who had had to be turned down when requesting the service.

The Council was proposing to charge residents who opted for the service an annual fee of £60 and there would also continue to be a one off £20 set up charge. When the service started to be delivered directly by the Council, the authority would initially lose £40,000 income received through current arrangements. However, Officers calculated that the authority would need to attract approximately 600 customers, in addition to the existing number of customers, in order to break even. There would be capacity to increase the service to provide for up to 6,000 customers, which would result in an increase in income.

There were significant financial costs attached to procuring a new vehicle for the Garden Waste Collection service and this could also take time to arrange. Therefore, initially, it was anticipated that the Council would hire an extra vehicle until a new vehicle could be purchased, although it was likely that the hire vehicle would be used for other waste and recycling services so that a Council owned

vehicle could be used for Garden Waste Collections and the green credentials of the service would then be advertised on that vehicle.

The Executive Committee was advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had pre-scrutinised the report at a meeting held on 26th October 2023. During this meeting, questions had been raised about the potential for the Council to provide this service to residents on low incomes. Whilst this might be difficult in the short-term to achieve, due to the initial financial implications of introducing the service, there was the potential that this matter could be explored further in the long-term. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had also queried whether the Council had a waiting list in terms of local residents who had expressed an interest in receiving the Garden Waste Collection service in the future. Members were asked to note that there was no waiting list at present, as the Council had not wanted to raise expectations that could not be met. However, this could be implemented once a decision had been taken to introduce a Garden Waste Collection service.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed the proposals in detail and in doing so welcomed the potential to introduce a Garden Waste Collection Service at the Council. Members suggested that, due to the number of enquiries received by Councillors from residents on a regular basis about the potential for the Garden Waste Collection service to be extended to new customers, it was anticipated that there would be sufficient demand for the service to enable the Council to deliver the service without this being at a significant cost to the authority. It was also noted that the introduction of a Garden Waste Collection service would have a beneficial impact on recycling rates for the Borough; the Council's recycling rates did not currently compare favourably with other Councils in the county because they all operated chargeable Garden Waste Collection services which contributed to their higher recycling rates.

Reference was made to the potential to promote the Garden Waste Collection service on the vehicle used for the service. Members commented that this could help to encourage more residents to use the service.

RESOLVED that

- 1) subject to approval of recommendations 2 – 4 below, to agree the creation of a dedicated Garden Waste Collection Service for Redditch Borough Council residents;**

RECOMMENDED

- 2) **an increase to the cost on Fees and Charges for Garden Waste to £60 per year, whilst maintaining the existing one-off set up fee of £20 for new customers;**
- 3) **inclusion of the following Capital and Revenue expenses in the Medium-Term Financial Plan:**

Capital Investment	
2025/26 & Inclusion on Fleet Replacement Schedule	£210,000

Revenue Investment	
2023/24	£11,000
2024/25	£156,000
2025/26	£135,000
2026/27 Onwards	£114,000

- 4) **adjusting the Medium Term Financial Plan to reflect the following financial pressures:**

2023/24	-£11,897
2024/25	-£20,528

42. ANNUAL REFRESH OF COUNCIL PLAN

The Acting Chief Executive presented the refresh of the Council Plan for Members' consideration.

The Executive Committee was advised that the Council Plan detailed the Council's vision and the strategic purposes, or Council priorities, underpinning this. The strategic purposes had been informed by the data available and a review of the content of the Council Plan had been undertaken by the Leader and Portfolio Holders. It was recognised that the Council needed to work closely with other key partners in order to meet the needs of local communities and to address the strategic purposes. The Council Plan and strategic purposes would be reviewed in more detail following the local elections that were due to take place in May 2024.

When reviewing the content of the Council Plan, feedback received from residents who had completed the Council's community survey had been taken into account. There had been three key priorities highlighted by residents in completed surveys:

- Community safety

- Parks and well maintained public spaces
- Housing

Based on this feedback and taking into account other key data, these three priorities were proposed as the focus for the Council's strategic purposes moving forward, alongside economic development.

Members welcomed the proposed amendments to the Council Plan and strategic purposes detailed in the report and highlighted that the changes, given they were informed by feedback received in completed community survey panel responses, demonstrated that the Council was listening to the public. Officers were asked to thank residents for the feedback that they had provided in completed surveys and to highlight how their responses had informed proposed changes to the Council Plan.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **the 2023/24 annual refresh of the strategic priorities, associated with the key deliverables and financial implications, be approved.**
- 2) **the process of establishing and agreeing meaningful outcomes for the key deliverables be approved and reported within the Financial and Organisational Quarterly Performance Reports; and**
- 3) **a full review of Council Plan and priorities for 2024 – 2027 take place in Autumn 2024 alongside the financial planning process and in accordance with the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP).**

43. FINANCE RECOVERY PLAN - UPDATE

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Finance Recovery Plan for the Executive Committee's consideration.

Members were advised that the report set out the processes the Council had been following to rectify a deterioration in its financial position and processes due to the impact of the implementation of a new financial system in February 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic. This followed on from reports to the Executive Committee in September 2022 and July 2023. The Audit Governance and Standards Committee was also receiving similar updates at all their meetings.

Since the report to the Executive Committee, the following progress had been achieved:

- A draft Outturn Report for 2022/23 had been presented to the Executive Committee.
- The draft 2022/23 Revenue Outturn Estimates had been presented to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).
- The draft 2022/23 Capital Outturn Estimates had been presented to DLUHC.
- A Quarter 1 Finance and Performance Report 2023/24 had been presented to the Executive Committee.
- Joint work had continued with the external auditors on providing evidence of control balances at the time of the transfer from the old finance system to TechOne on the 8th February 2021. The external auditors had validation routines for the 2020/21 financial year and were in the process of reviewing this data. However, the Council was still due to provide data and an agreement had now been reached with the Council's previous financial system providers, to deliver this data to the external auditors.
- The 2021/22 Housing Benefits Audit had been signed off.
- Financial Awareness Training with Managers had taken place.
- Budget Management Training for Managers (including use of TechOne) had taken place.
- Monthly Accounts Payable Training was taking place.
- The Council had recruited a Head of Management Accountancy on the 20th September 2023 and two temporary Technical Accountants.
- The Council had upgraded the TechOne finance system to the latest version in July 2023.
- The Financial Compliance Report, setting out movement in the financial recovery plan, had been reviewed by the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee in July and September 2023.

There were still significant concerns in relation to closure of the accounts, and their delivery, as there was the potential that the Government would introduce new national timetables. The Government had set statutory deadlines for the completion of the audit of accounts as follows:

- Accounts for 2015/16 through to 2019/20 needed to be signed off by 30th December 2023
- Accounts for 2020/21 and 2021/22 needed to be signed off by 31st March 2024
- Accounts for 2022/23 needed to be signed off by 30th September 2024

The Council was still on track to clear the suspense backlog by the end of the 2023 calendar year and, with this, would finally be able to complete the 2020/21 and 2021/22 Revenue Outturn (RO) and Capital Outturn (CO) forms and all the VAT returns.

The Quarter 2 monitoring, which was due to be considered by the Executive Committee in December 2023, had for the first time been delivered on the TechOne system following the training that took place in September 2023.

The Council had been going through a Value for Money (VfM) audit. The accounts would not be verified until the full take from balances had been finalised. However, the annual VfM audit was on track to be reported to the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee in November 2023. The Council was anticipating that this would provide a positive analysis of the financial situation at the authority.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed the challenges that had been encountered by the Council following the introduction of the TechOne finance system and questions were raised about whether this remained the right system for the Council to use moving forward. Officers explained that the issues with the system had emerged in relation to implementation. There were other Councils in the country that used the TechOne finance system successfully, but Redditch Borough and Bromsgrove District Councils had been the first authorities to use the cash receipting module and this had been the cause of many issues. The training that had been provided to budget managers would potentially result in improvements to budget management at the Council as well as helping to upskill those members of staff.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Progress made on the financial recovery be noted including:**
 - a) Delivery of the Statutory Accounts**
 - b) Delivery of Statutory Financial Returns**
 - c) Improvements in the Control Environment**
- 2) the work still under way to move back to a best practice operation and the associated timetable for completion of this work, as contained in this report, be noted.**

44. DRAFT COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2024/25

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented a report in respect of the draft Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25 for Members' consideration.

The Executive Committee was informed that the Council was required by section 13A(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (LGFA '92) 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 had to, for each tax year, consider whether to revise or replace its scheme. If the Council intended to revise or replace the scheme, then there was a requirement to undertake a formal consultation before making a new 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 Council had amended the scheme in the years since April 2021 to adjust the level of support in-line with funding available; to amend income bands and tapers to adjust for the impact of inflation; and to aid administration.

The existing scheme included a provision for the uprating of income bands by an inflation factor decided by the Council. Changes to income bands would be made in accordance with the existing scheme and would not require consultation but would be subject to the approval of Council. These increases would be based on the increases in benefits levels that would be announced in the Chancellor's Speech on 22nd November 2023.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the current Council Tax Reduction Scheme be retained for the 2024-25 tax year, subject to the uprating of income bands as provided for within the existing scheme; and**
- 2) options for the uprating of the income bands to be modelled and presented to Executive Committee for approval and the recommendation of new income grid to Council.**

45. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN - TRANCHE 1 BUDGET INCLUDING FEES AND CHARGES (PRIOR TO CONSULTATION)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Medium Term Financial Plan Tranche 1 Budget Report including fees and charges for the Executive Committee's consideration.

Members were informed that the budget setting process would be more complicated in 2023/24 compared to previous years. The Council would still be asked to consider budget proposals in two tranches and Council Tax would need to be agreed in February 2024. However, the Council's budget would be reviewed in a challenging macro-economic climate and this would impact on the settlement for local government. As the Chancellor's autumn statement was not due to take place until 22nd November 2023, the Council was not expecting to learn about the authority's financial settlement from the Government until late December 2023. The Executive Committee was asked to note that the settlement was likely to be for a two-year period.

The tranche 1 report detailed the progress that had been achieved to date and the current position of the Council's budget, prior to consultation with the public. This was intended to be the start of the Council's budget setting process and there remained opportunities to shape the budget during tranche 2 of the process.

During consideration of this item, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling thanked the Budget Scrutiny Working Group for reviewing the content of the report in detail at a meeting held on 30th October 2023. A number of suggestions had been made by Members during this meeting of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group and these would be explored further as part of tranche 2 of the budget setting process.

Reference was made to the fees and charges detailed at Appendix C to the report. Officers clarified that the proposal was for there to be a standard 7 per cent increase to the Council's fees and charges in 2024. However, Members were asked to note that one of the fees detailed within the report would be removed; this was the fee for the Lifeline analogue system, as the system no longer existed.

RESOLVED

- 1) that the inputs into the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan as at the start of October, and the associated risks and opportunities, be endorsed;**
- 2) to note that these inputs have been used, along with the 2023/24-25/26 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) agreed by Council in February 2023, to project an initial "gap" to be closed;**
- 3) the initial Tranche of savings proposals be published on the 24th October and any feedback will be considered by**

Executive in December 2023 prior to seeking approval at Council in January 2024;

- 4) to note that tranche 2 of this process will add further information such as the Local Government Settlement to give a final financial position for the Council; and**

RECOMMENDED that

- 5) the Play Audit recommended capital works for 2023/4 are approved and added to the Capital Programme.**

46. RECOMMENDATION FROM THE AUDIT, GOVERNANCE AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling explained that the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee had agreed a number of recommendations at a meeting held on 21st September 2023 which were designed to improve the audit process for Local Government accounts. The Executive Committee was advised that the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling was due to attend a Local Government Association (LGA) conference alongside other Councils' Portfolio Holders for Finance and he confirmed that he would ensure that this matter was raised at that conference.

Members thanked the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee for the recommendations and confirmed that these would be approved.

RESOLVED that

in relation to the proposed plans by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to tackle the backlog in local government audits by setting statutory deadlines for historic accounts to be cleared:

- 1) the Executive Committee ensure that the possibility of legislation being passed to speed up the local authority audit process be noted on the Council's Corporate Risk Register; and**
- 2) the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling be asked to lobby the Government through the Local Government Association (LGA) to provide a timeframe for when this legislation is to come into effect.**

47. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Leader confirmed that there were no outstanding recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee requiring consideration on this occasion.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7th September 2023 be noted.

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

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

49. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday 11th September 2023 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.10 pm