



# Executive Committee

Tuesday, 5th December,  
2023

## MINUTES

### Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), Councillor Gemma Monaco (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Joe Baker, Joanne Beecham, Brandon Clayton, Luke Court, Lucy Harrison, Bill Hartnett and Craig Warhurst

### Also Present:

Councillors Salman Akbar, Imran Altaf, Juliet Barker Smith, Juma Begum, James Fardoe, Andrew Fry, Sharon Harvey, Joanna Kane, Sid Khan, Anthony Lovell, Emma Marshall, Kerrie Miles, Jane Spilsbury, Monica Stringfellow and Ian Woodall

### Officers:

Peter Carpenter, Nicola Cummings, Amanda Delahunty, Claire Felton, Sue Hanley, Bev Houghton, Michelle Howell, Ishrat Karimi-Fini, Becky Talbot and Judith Willis

### Democratic Services Officers:

Jess Bayley-Hill and Jo Gresham

## 50. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

## 51. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

During consideration of Minute Item No 55 – Homelessness Prevention Grant and Domestic Abuse Grant - Councillor Bill Hartnett declared an other disclosable interest in respect of the proposed funding for GreenSquare Accord, for supported accommodation for ex-offenders. This declaration was made in Councillor Hartnett's capacity as a Councillor appointed by the authority, as an outside body appointment, to Redditch Co-operative Homes, which was part of GreenSquare Accord. As he commented that Redditch Co-operative Homes was not directly involved with the work of GreenSquare Accord in respect of delivering this supported accommodation for ex-offenders, Councillor Hartnett remained in the room during the debate in respect of this matter and took part in the vote thereon.

Chair

## 52. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader advised that at the latest meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023, Members had considered recommendations from the Budget Scrutiny Working Group in respect of the Finance and Performance Quarter 2 Monitoring Report. The Committee had agreed two recommendations on this subject which had been published in a supplementary pack for the Executive Committee meeting. The Leader urged Executive Committee Members to consider these recommendations when debating that item.

The Committee was asked to note that there was a main agenda and two supplementary agenda packs for the meeting. The first supplementary agenda pack contained the full report, including covering report and appendices, for the Public Space Protection Order and Finance and Performance Quarter 2 Monitoring reports. The Leader had taken the decision to only publish the covering reports in the main agenda due to the significant lengths of both reports and the benefits of trying to reduce the amount of paper printed for meetings in line with the authority's commitments in the Carbon Reduction Strategy. The full reports had been published in the first supplementary pack for the meeting on the same day as the main agenda, five clear working days in advance of the meeting. Paper copies of this pack had been provided to each of the political party group rooms and the full reports had been available to access electronically throughout this time.

## 53. MINUTES

**RESOLVED that**

**the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.**

## 54. ANIMAL, BIRD AND FISH WELFARE ON COUNCIL LAND POLICY

The Parks and Events Services Manager presented the Animal, Bird and Fish Welfare on Council Land Policy for Members' consideration and in doing so reminded Members that this policy had been brought forward following agreement of a Motion on Notice on this subject at the Council meeting held in September 2023.

The main purpose of the policy was to ensure that animals, fish and birds did not suffer abuse on Council land. As part of this process,

it would not be possible to offer animals, fish or birds as prizes at events held on Council land.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed the content of the policy and welcomed the fact that an exception would be made to enable the use of animals for educational purposes, such as by charitable organisations. Members also noted that giving animals, birds and fish as prizes at events held in Redditch had fortunately not been an issue on Council land in recent years, but the policy would help to reinforce the fact that such practice would not be welcomed.

**RESOLVED that**

**the Animal, Bird and Fish Welfare on Council Land Policy, be approved.**

**55. HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT AND DOMESTIC ABUSE GRANT**

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager presented a report on the subject of the Homelessness Prevention Grant and the Domestic Abuse Grant.

The Committee was advised that the grant funding was ring-fenced to support homelessness reduction and victims of domestic abuse. The Council was proposing to use the funding to support local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations which together provided the range of services needed to help people at risk of homelessness and domestic abuse. The Council was in the process of reviewing how best to provide a rough sleeping service in the Borough. Some funding was left over in the Council's funding allocations from Government and this could be used to address rough sleeping, using a proposed delegation to the Head of Community and Housing Services.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed a number of points in detail:

- The potential for the funding to be used to help reduce use of bed and breakfast properties as temporary accommodation.
- The ongoing work being undertaken to try to reduce rough sleeping in the Borough.
- The provision of support, through this funding, to vulnerable groups in society including people experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse as well as young people struggling to access affordable housing.
- The valuable provision of accommodation to ex-offenders by GreenSquare Accord.

- The increased financial support that the Council had provided to the Citizens Advice Bureau, which had experienced significant demand during the cost of living crisis.
- A recent homelessness workshop that had been held by Officers and the outcomes of this session.
- The arrangements in place to monitor use of the grant funding allocated by the Council to VCS organisations and how this was reported. Officers clarified that, following an audit of the process, monitoring arrangements had been strengthened and VCS groups were required to complete a spreadsheet demonstrating compliance on a quarterly basis in order to receive funding.
- The level of grant funding that had been allocated to Redditch and whether this was sufficient to tackle problems with homelessness and domestic abuse.
- The funding that had remained unused in the previous funding round.
- The additional funding the previous year and the top up to the Homelessness Prevention Grant which had been unexpectedly received during the year, alongside income generated from the Crash Pad and another temporary accommodation unit, had provided sufficient underspent grant to fund the initiatives that had been identified in this latest round of funding. Grant applications from partners had increased between 25 – 30 per cent since the previous year due to increases in salary costs and other associated costs.
- The grant funding that had been allocated to New Starts to help provide households with furniture and the fact that other local VCS bodies, such as the Tardebigge Relief in Need and Sickness Charities, were continuing to receive requests for help providing furniture to Council tenants.
- The action that was taken to promote the VCS groups' services that received grant funding from the Council. The Committee was advised that VCS organisations were responsible for promoting their own services.

## RESOLVED that

- 1) **the following initiatives be approved to receive allocation of funding 2024/25.**

Initiatives	£ (up to £417,067)
Redditch Nightstop - Outreach Worker to support 21 to 35 year olds and prevent homelessness or work towards planned moves into suitable and sustainable accommodation.	26,566

Redditch Nightstop Core Funding	13,000
Redditch Nightstop Safe Accommodation and Support	15,000
Rough Sleeper Outreach Service	45,599
GreenSquare Accord – 18 units of supported accommodation for Ex Offenders or those likely to offend	16,852
Newstarts - Furniture Project to provide furniture for homeless households.	10,000
Homelessness Prevention - Spend to Save budget for use by Housing Options Officers	17,060
Temporary Accommodation Management – as 3.1 above	66,380
St Basils Smallwood Almshouses - Progression Coach to offer additional support that can operate outside of normal office hours to fit around a young persons education, training and employment.	24,476
St Basils Young Persons Pathway Worker	24,572
St Basils Crash Pad emergency accommodation	43,472
Citizens Advice Debt Advice and Affordability Assessments	51,119
County Partnership Manager	9,500
Single and Childless Couples Homeless Prevention Service	33,460
Batchley Support Group	20,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£417,056</b>
<b>Underspend</b>	<b>£ 11</b>

- 2) **delegated authority be granted to the Head of Community and Housing Services, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement and the Portfolio Holder for Community Services and Regulatory Services, to use any unallocated Grant during the year or make further adjustments as necessary to ensure full utilisation of the Grants for 2024/25 in support of existing or new schemes.**

(During consideration of this item, Councillor Bill Hartnett declared an other disclosable interest in respect of the proposed funding for

GreenSquare Accord, for supported accommodation for ex-offenders. This declaration was made in Councillor Hartnett's capacity as a Councillor appointed by the authority, as an outside body appointment, to Redditch Co-operative Homes, which was part of GreenSquare Accord. As he commented that Redditch Co-operative Homes was not directly involved with the work of GreenSquare Accord in respect of delivering this supported accommodation for ex-offenders, Councillor Hartnett remained in the room during the debate in respect of this matter and took part in the vote thereon.)

## **56. PROPOSAL FOR A PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDER (PSPO) IN REDDITCH TOWN CENTRE**

The Community Safety Manager presented a report which detailed a proposal to introduce a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) in Redditch Town Centre.

The Committee was advised that the report detailed the proposed wording of the order, the geographic location in which the PSPO would apply and the data that had informed the proposal. Partner organisations, including West Mercia Police, had been consulted and an equality impact assessment had been undertaken. The proposed PSPO had the support of the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and would help to tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB) in the town centre.

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

- The additional powers that would be provided to the police once the PSPO was in place.
- The signage that would be displayed in order to encourage people to report ASB observed in the town centre. Members commented that the signage would also help to deter potential perpetrators.
- The length of time that had been spent by officers working on this PSPO. It was noted that this period of time had coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic which had caused delays, such as in relation to gathering data. Members were advised that there did need to be evidence available in order to implement a PSPO.
- The positive impact that the PSPO would potentially have on the extent to which people felt safe when they were in the town centre as well as supporting local businesses.
- The comments that had been provided by the public who had been consulted in the survey, which indicated that many people did not report ASB when they witnessed this and the

suggestion was made that action needed to be taken to encourage residents to report incidents.

**RESOLVED that**

**a Public Space Protection Order to restrict Antisocial Behaviour related to Alcohol and Misuse of Psychoactive Substances be implemented.**

**57. THE JOINT AUDITOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22 TO 2022/23**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Joint Auditor's Annual Report 2021/22 to 2022/23 for Members' consideration.

The Committee was advised that the external auditor, Grant Thornton, was required to confirm that the local authority had made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. This took the form of a value for money report and this was being presented for Members' consideration.

The report detailed the progress that had been achieved since the Council was issued with a Section 24 Notice in 2022. That Section 24 Notice had contained six key recommendations, five of which had been addressed and this was acknowledged by the external auditors. The remaining key recommendation that had not yet been resolved related to the Council's outstanding accounts. There was one new key recommendation linked to organisational capability and capacity. The Council was taking mitigating action, mainly through the rollout of the Workforce Strategy.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling commented that the Section 24 Notice remained open whilst action was still being taken on the authority's accounts. Whilst the external auditors had recognised that a lot of progress had been made by the Council, it was acknowledged that there was a lot more work to do, particularly with regard to the closure of the accounts. It was anticipated that this work would be resolved by the end of the year.

The Committee subsequently discussed the content of the report in detail and in doing so commented on the following matters:

- The hard work of the Financial Services team to remedy the issues that had caused the delays to the closure of the Council's accounts.
- The difficulties that had been experienced with the Council's ERP finance system and the lessons that had been learned from this.

- The criticisms in respect of financial governance detailed within the report and the progress that had been achieved in terms of financial and performance monitoring since this time.
- The financial difficulties experienced by many Councils around the country and the extent to which the Government was providing local authorities with sufficient funding.
- The £6 million shortfall recorded in a table in the report and the extent to which this accurately represented the Council's current financial sustainability. Officers explained that this point had been challenged with the external auditors, who had explained that the figures were based on the overall position in the previous Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). However, Members were asked to note that by the date of the meeting, the Council was forecasting a gap of £100,000.
- The suggestion in the report that the Council's Whistleblowing Policy needed to be updated and the date when this last occurred. The Committee was advised that the Whistleblowing Policy had last been updated in 2018 and an update would be reported in 2024.
- The reference made in the report to the potential appointment of independent persons to the Council's Audit, Governance and Standards Committee and the reasons why no progress had been achieved in terms of appointing independent persons in Redditch. Members were informed that attempts had been made to recruit independent members of the Committee in recent years, but these had not been successful and it was suggested that a lack of remuneration on offer for the position might act as a deterrent. The Constitution Review Working Party would potentially need to review this matter and the option of providing remuneration, further.
- The difficulties that the Council had experienced with organisational capacity and the relatively high turnover of staff. The Committee was advised that nationally, staff turnover had increased from 2 per cent, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, to 16 per cent by 2023. Staff prepared to work in London for a small number of days a week could receive significantly higher wages than employees based outside the capital and this impacted on recruitment in other parts of the country.
- The external auditor's assessment of the performance data provided in the quarterly finance and performance monitoring reports and the issues that had been identified with this data. Members were informed that, whilst it was acknowledged that Members were receiving performance data in these reports, questions had been raised about whether the appropriate



performance data was being provided for Members' consideration.

- The reference in the report to feedback forms on the subject of savings proposals and what this feedback had focused on. Officers clarified that the Council had a two-tranche approach to setting the MTFP and a feedback form was provided in relation to the savings included in tranche 1 in 2022, although no feedback had been received. In 2023, the tranche 1 report had not contained any proposals for cuts, although it was possible there would be proposals in the tranche 2 report, depending on the Government's financial settlement for the Council, and any such proposals would be subject to consultation.
- The likely Government settlement for local government. Members were advised that a 3 per cent increase was anticipated but this would be in a context of increasing financial pressures for Councils.
- The local authorities that had issued Section 114 Notices in recent months and the targeted Government interventions that were likely to occur at those Councils.
- The extent to which the Council would be required to pay additional fees as a consequence of the Section 24 Notice. Officers clarified that there were no fees that had been announced, although it was possible that the external auditors would request additional payment for any extra work required to audit the accounts. Officers could challenge this figure should there be concerns about the level proposed.

The number of Section 24 Notices that had been issued to the Council was discussed by Members at some length, in particular whether this was an extension of the Council's second Section 24 Notice or a third Section 24 Notice. Reference was made to the comments that had been made by the external auditors at a recent meeting of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee on this subject. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling explained that the external auditors had been approached for comment on this subject after that meeting. The external auditors had provided the following comment, which was read out to Members at the meeting, on this subject:

*"This S24 updates the previous recommendation that was issued 13 months ago, given we reported that recommendation was not fully complete but that some areas had progressed while others hadn't. In that sense it replaces what was said 13 months ago in the recommendation with the latest position."*

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling commented that the external auditors had reported that there was no legal mechanism to update a Section 24 Notice so the auditors had been required to issue one. However, the auditors stated that this needed to be viewed within the context of the previous one and they had noted the progress made.

**RECOMMENDED that**

**the Section 24 Statutory Recommendation be accepted and that Council review the recommendation and endorse the actions included in the management responses which form the rectification process required as per legislation.**

**58. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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

**RESOLVED that**

**the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2023 be noted.**

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

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

**60. FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE QUARTER 2 REPORT 2023/24**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Finance and Performance Quarter 2 Report 2023/24 for the Committee's consideration.

The Committee was advised that the Council had an £11.1 million budget for 2023/24 which had been approved by Council in February 2023. By the date of the meeting, the Council was forecasting a revenue overspend for 2023/24 in the region of £596,000. The overspend position was mainly due to the pay award of £1,925 to all staff, backdated to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 as well as to the impact of homelessness and temporary accommodation costs. However, this would be partly mitigated by the receipt of homelessness prevention grant funding, use of unused funding from the utilities reserve and an increase in income for some service areas.

The Council has a capital programme of £12.6 million which was approved in the budget in February 2023. Of this, £10.6 million was externally funded whilst £2.0 million was Council funded. At quarter two, the actual spend against the original 2023/24 capital budget was £1.267 million.

By the date of the meeting, it was anticipated that there would be underspends in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Budget underspends were projected against repairs and maintenance and supervision and management due to vacancies in some parts of the service. This resulted in an overall projected surplus on services totalling £73,000, which would be contributed to HRA reserves. In addition to this, there was a £174,000 projected underspend against the £11.725 million HRA capital programme.

Members subsequently discussed the content of the report in detail and in so doing commented on the following points:

- The Town's Fund allocation for Redditch and whether this would be sufficient to cover the financial costs involved in work on the innovation centre, demolition of the current library site in the town and the refurbishment of the Town Hall.
- The decision making process that had been followed for the use of the Town's Fund. Members were advised that figures in reports had initially been based on estimates and all of these issues had been reported to both the Executive Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- The proposed bids for fundings in respect of the innovation centre and project managers, due to be considered by the Executive Committee in January 2024.
- The poor energy efficiency rating that had been reported for Winyates Craft Centre and the action that would be taken to address this.
- The potential issues, in terms of the energy efficiency ratings of other community centres in the Borough and the plans in place to address this.
- The timescales for completion of the review of the energy efficiency ratings of all of the Council's assets. Officers explained that further clarity on this point should be available by spring 2024.
- The extent to which the Council was likely to receive additional funding from the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) for projects in the town centre.
- The Council's eligibility to receive funding as a partner in the former Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) and the extent to which access to this funding was at risk following the issuing of a Section 114 Notice to Birmingham City Council. Officers clarified that all of the partner organisations from the former GBSLEP had

agreed that the LEP's remaining funds should be divided equally and each organisation, including Redditch Borough Council, was due to receive £2.5 million.

- The risks to the Council's finances that would arise should the projects delivered using Town's Fund support not be delivered to deadline. Officers confirmed that this was a risk, although extensions were likely to be offered.
- The six-month extensions that had already been offered by the Government to Councils in receipt of New High Street funding, where needed, which was originally due to be delivered by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.
- The deadline for the delivery of projects using Levelling Up funding, which was 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025. Officers confirmed that Bromsgrove District Council had requested an extension to the deadline for their project.
- The initial conversations that officers had already held with the Government about the potential for an extension for Redditch on the Town's Fund, should this be required. The Government had responded by highlighting that this was two and a half years away and therefore a decision could not be taken on an extension in respect of this matter at this stage.
- The progress that had been achieved with sales of Council land, as previously agreed by Members, and the extent to which these sales were likely to attract the capital receipts that had been anticipated. Officers explained that an agreement was close to being reached on Far Moor Lane and a report in respect of a separate land sale would be presented for Members' consideration in January 2024.
- The desktop investigation into Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) and the outcomes of this investigation. Officers explained that this review had found no Council assets that had used RAAC, although if any examples were identified, these would be reported.

During consideration of this item, reference was made to the Budget Scrutiny Working Group's pre-scrutiny of the Finance and Performance Quarter 2 Monitoring Report 2023/24. The group had made a number of recommendations on this subject, which had been endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023. The Executive Committee welcomed the work of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group and it was confirmed that the group's recommendations would be approved.

## **RESOLVED that**

- 1) the current overspend position in relation to Revenue and Capital Budgets for the period April to September 2023 and the full year overspend position of £39,000 after**

applying £557,000 from the Utilities Reserve as approved at Quarter 1 be noted;

- 2) the present status of the Asset Strategy be noted;
- 3) one additional contract be added to the procurements over £200k due to be delivered during 2023/4 from the Quarter 1 list;
- 4) the Quarter 2 Performance data for the Period April to September 2023 be noted;
- 5) an officer report be requested that provides a model of the financial implications of an unusually high demand for emergency housing and temporary accommodation support;
- 6) with reference to the Strategic and Operational Performance measures in the Report (subsection Work and Financial Independence), the Essex / Preston models that link skills and developments to social value within Procurement be examined further; and

**RECOMMENDED that**

- 7) Changes to the Capital Programme in relation to ICT are actioned, bringing forward Cyber Security linked Tape Drive replacements from 2024/5 into 2023/4.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm  
and closed at 7.42 pm