

# Executive Committee

Tuesday, 9th January, 2024

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## MINUTES

### Present:

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

### Also Present:

Councillor Sharon Harvey

### Officers:

Toni Ainscough, Peter Carpenter, Mark Cox, Nicola Cummings, Sue Hanley, Ishrat Karimi-Fini, Bernard Ofori-Atta and Simon Wilkes

### Democratic Services Officers:

Jo Gresham

### 61. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Joanne Beecham.

### 62. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

### 63. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader advised that at the latest meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2024, Members had pre-scrutinised the proposals in the Redditch Play Audit and Investment Strategy, which was also due to be considered at the Executive Committee meeting. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had proposed two recommendations as a result of the consideration of the report. The Leader urged Members to consider these

Chair

recommendations when debating the Redditch Play Audit and Investment Strategy during the meeting.

It was also reported that at a Budget Scrutiny Working Group meeting held on 2nd January 2024 the following items were pre-scrutinised:

1. Council Tax Base and Business Rates Yield 2024/25
2. Council Tax - Discretionary Council Tax Reduction Policy - Council Section 13A(C) Policy
3. Council Tax - Empty Homes Discounts and Premiums
4. Final Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25
5. HRA Rent Setting 2024/25
6. Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-25 to 2026-27 Tranche 1 (following consultation)

Executive Committee were informed that the Budget Scrutiny Working Group had made no recommendations in respect of the above reports. The Leader thanked both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Budget Scrutiny Working Group for the time taken in pre-scrutinising these reports.

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 appendices, for the Redditch Play Audit and Investment Strategy and Medium Term Financial Plan reports. The Leader had taken the decision to only publish the covering reports in the main agenda due to the significant length of both reports and the benefits of trying to reduce the amount of paper printed for meetings in line with the Authority's commitment to the Carbon Reduction Strategy. The full reports for these items, including appendices, were published in the Additional Papers 1 pack 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 in each of the political party group rooms and the full reports were also available to access electronically throughout this time.

## 64. MINUTES

**RESOLVED that**

**the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2023 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.**

**65. REDDITCH PLAY AUDIT AND INVESTMENT STRATEGY**

The Cultural Services and Parks Manager presented the Redditch Play Audit and Investment Strategy for Members' consideration.

Members were advised that the Redditch Play Audit and Investment Strategy had been undertaken as a result of the Leisure and Culture Strategy. The audit was an opportunity to ascertain the current situation of play provision in Redditch and how future play provision could improve the overall accessibility of play provision in Redditch.

It was reported that there were currently forty two play areas across the Borough. Of these forty two, nine had an expected life span of up to three years. Also included in the proposals were the following:

- The creation of two new neighbourhood level play spaces.
- The upgrading of three play spaces from Local to Neighbourhood provision.
- The upgrade of a further seven Neighbourhood play spaces and nine local play spaces.
- The decommissioning of six existing play spaces that were at 'end of life'.
- Investment in a further twenty seven play spaces, that were currently in good condition, however, they would need upgrading within the next ten years.

During the presentation of the report, it was noted that the inequality of provision had been mapped and assessed in detail through computer based mapping (GIS). Furthermore, it was explained that play areas needed to comply with national standards in order to satisfy risk management procedures and to comply with the Council's insurers requirements.

The Cultural Services and Parks Manager outlined the financial implications contained within the report and that £100,000 of the 2023/24 play area requirement had already been accounted for in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2024-25 to 26-27 (Tranche 1) proposals.

It was hoped that the works proposed for the play spaces within the Borough would provide adequate spaces where children could play and spend time outdoors. This was in line with the Council's Strategic Purpose of providing safe, well maintained and green neighbourhoods.

Following the presentation of the report Members considered the recommendations that had been received from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It was felt that both recommendations had been covered within the Officer report and that the areas highlighted would be addressed in the future. The Leader once again, thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for pre-scrutinising the report.

Officers were questioned regarding the provision of play areas within Matchborough and whether the Eathorpe Close play area had been identified for removal. It was confirmed that this area had been considered for removal. However, the nearby Matchborough Rock play area was identified as a play space that would be improved as part of the Strategy. Following the confirmation that the Eathorpe Close had been identified for removal some Members felt that this was an example of how the Play Audit had not been undertaken thoroughly and therefore the recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny Committee were indeed appropriate. As a result, the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were then proposed and seconded.

There followed a brief discussion regarding the financial implications of the Redditch Play Audit and Investment Strategy and confirmation that £100,000 had been accounted for in the MTFP 2024-25 to 26-27 (Tranche 1) and that there would a total spend of £2m over a ten year period as outlined in the report.

Members welcomed the Strategy and stated that it provided a clear direction for play provision in the Borough for the future. The implementation of the Strategy would also address any deficiencies identified within the Play Audit and would result in 96.1% of households within the Borough with access to a play space within a walking distance of ten minutes. The remaining 3.9% of households would typically have access to a play space area within fifteen minutes walking distance.

It was requested by Members that a map be provided as a visual representation of the geographical spread of play areas within the Borough for Members' information. Officers undertook to provide this.

The recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were then put to the vote as follows:

- 1) The criteria of the Redditch Play Assessment be reviewed to ensure that play facilities in every ward are fit for purpose and provide for the needs of children of all ages and young people and families.
- 2) The Redditch Play Audit and Investment Strategy (Appendix 2) is amended accordingly to ensure that the strategic purpose of 'living independent, active and healthy lives' is front and centre.

On being put to the vote these recommendations were lost.

The recommendations contained within the report were then considered and on being put to the vote it was

## **RESOLVED that**

- 1) the approach to improve the accessibility of equipped children's play as presented in the Redditch Play Assessment be adopted;**
- 2) the approach to capital investment as presented in, The Redditch Play Audit and Investment Strategy (Appendix 2) is accepted and that officers are requested to prepare bids for capital funding, as applicable, to be considered in due course and in the context of other funding bids.**

## **66. PLANNING ENFORCEMENT POLICY**

The Technical Services Manager, Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) presented the Planning Enforcement Policy for Members' consideration. In doing so the following was highlighted:

- The Council's current Planning Enforcement Policy had been established in 2011 and this new policy sought to provide an update to this policy in line with current Planning legislation.

- The Policy outlined the process undertaken in respect of enforcement, when enforcement action might be considered, when Planning breaches had occurred and the prioritisation of an Enforcement Work Programme.
- Enforcement action took a significant amount of time to carry out. It was therefore proposed that greater engagement and liaison would be undertaken with alleged offenders in order to bring them in line and comply with the Policy.
- It was not always appropriate to undertake Planning Enforcement and Officers could not compel parties to apply for Planning consent and it was not always in the public interest to enforce breaches.

Following the presentation Members agreed that this Policy was welcomed and would help to clarify the current situation. However, they were keen that engagement with alleged offenders be made early and in a proactive and robust manner. It was felt that enforcement was critical to ensure that Green Belt land was not encroached upon and that building regulations were adhered to from a Health and Safety perspective. Members were reminded that Officers could not force people to apply for Planning permission, but that the process now would encourage and aid the process of enforcement in the future.

**RECOMMENDED that**

**the Council endorse the Planning Enforcement Policy.**

**67. COUNCIL TAX BASE AND BUSINESS RATES YIELD 2024/25**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Council Tax Base and Business Rates Yield 2024/25. During the presentation it was highlighted that the report was required under the Local Authorities (calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 2012 in order that the following could calculate the Council Tax amounts for the 2024/25 financial year:

- Redditch Borough Council
- Worcestershire County Council
- Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia Authority
- Hereford and Worcestershire Combined Fire Authority
- Feckenham Parish Council

It was reported that a 2% allowance for non-collection had been included within the report and that Business Rates Yields would be considered at the next Executive Committee meeting, as the Worcestershire and Herefordshire Business Rates Pool meeting was due to take place on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2024 to finalise arrangements.

Following the presentation of the report some Members queried the non-collection rate percentage. In response officers explained that the non-collection rates were set at 2% and it was hoped that the collection rates would be at 98% although in some years it had been slightly lower. It was always a fine balance between chasing outstanding debt in this area as it could take considerable time and be costly.

**RECOMMENDED that**

- 1) **The calculation of the council tax base for the whole and parts of the area for 2024/25 be approved and**
- 2) **In accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the figures calculated by Redditch Borough Council as its tax base for the whole area be 26,317.1 and for the parts of the area listed below be:**

<b>Parish of Feckenham</b>	<b>380.3</b>
<b>Rest of Redditch</b>	<b><u>25,936.8</u></b>
<b>Total for the Borough</b>	<b><u>26,317.1</u></b>

**68. COUNCIL TAX - DISCRETIONARY COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION POLICY - COUNCIL SECTION 13A(C) POLICY**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Discretionary Council Tax Reduction Policy - Council Section 13A(C) Policy report. In doing so it was explained that the Council had power under S13A(1)(C) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to reduce the amount of Council Tax a person was liable for. This power could be exercised on a case by case basis.

The Executive Committee was informed that a current example of this was relief for Care Leavers which was undertaken across the County and reimbursed by Worcestershire County Council (WCC). A further example of this was Severe Weather (for example flooding) where Council Tax was waived for at least three months with this being reimbursed to the Council by the Government.

The framework allowed the Council to make local decisions with the Policy, which it was noted, had not changed from the previous year and was set out in the appendix to the covering report.

Members were reminded that there was already Council Tax relief available for residents on low incomes through the Council Tax Support Scheme. This report was due to be considered later on in the meeting.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling stated that should reliefs be given, and were not reimbursed by Government, then the Council had to fund any payments made. It was confirmed that the Council had not made any of these individual reliefs for a number of years.

Following the presentation of the report, it was queried whether there was a cap on the number of individual reliefs awarded per year. It was clarified that this was not the case, and if it were, it would result in having to include a budget line within the Council's budget which stated how much these reliefs would cost on an annual basis and how much was allocated per year.

## **RECOMMENDED that**

- 1) The Section 13A(1)(C) policy be approved and adopted from 1st April 2024.**

## **69. COUNCIL TAX - EMPTY HOMES DISCOUNTS AND PREMIUMS**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Council Tax Empty Home Discounts and Premiums report. It was reported that until April 2004 empty homes were eligible for a Council Tax discount of 50%. However, 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 most significant changes were outlined as follows:

- the period for which a dwelling must be vacant before a property was classed as a long-term empty dwelling was reduced from 2 years to 1 year, and a requirement introduced to consider guidance issued by the Secretary of State before the application of premiums was decided.
- Powers were given to the billing authority to apply a premium of up to 100% for any dwellings that were furnished and had no residents. These dwellings would usually be second homes where the owner lived elsewhere and used the property as holiday or occasional accommodation.

The Executive Committee were informed that the Council currently applied the full premium to all long-term empty homes. The decision to apply premiums was made on the basis that a dwelling would be subject to the premium if vacant for 2 years or more. The amendment to section 11B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 meant that, from 1st April 2024 the existing wording of the Council's determination meant that, the premium would be applied to all dwellings that had been vacant for twelve months or more.

It was reported that at the commencement of the 2022/23 tax year - the first year that the Council applied the Premium - 133 dwellings were subject to the Premium. The number of dwellings for which the Premium was now levied had reduced to 61 dwellings.

Following the presentation of the report Members stated that they welcomed the report and on being put to the vote it was

## **RECOMMENDED that**

- 1) From 1st April 2024, under section 11B(1) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for long-term empty dwellings the discount under section 11(2)(a) would not apply and the additional Council Tax Premium applied would be:**

- i. For a dwelling that had been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for less than 5 years – 100% premium.
- ii. For a dwelling that had been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for 5 years or more, but less than 10 years – 200% premium.
- iii. For a dwelling that had been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for 10 years or more – 300% premium.

2) The Head of Financial and Customer Services on a case-by-case basis may consider a reduction to the long-term empty premium under section 13A(1)(C) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

#### **70. FINAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2024/25**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Final Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25 for Members' consideration. During the presentation it was stated that under section 13A(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (LGFA '92) the Council was required to operate a Council Tax Reduction Scheme specifying the reductions in Council Tax that was provided to people who were in financial need.

The existing scheme included a provision for the uprating of income bands by an inflation factor decided by the Council. Changes to income bands were made in accordance with the existing scheme and would not require consultation but would be subject to approval of Council. These increases would be based on the increases in benefit levels as stated in the Chancellor's Speech on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023 which was set at 6.7%.

During consideration of this report, it was noted that the Portfolio Holder's name within the report was incorrect, and Officers undertook to rectify this for the future.

Following the presentation of the report Members felt that this was a good scheme that benefitted the residents of Redditch.

**RECOMMENDED that**

- 1) **The Council Tax Reduction Scheme be retained for 2024-25 tax year, subject to uprating of income bands by 6.7%.**

## **71. HRA RENT SETTING 2024/25**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement presented the HRA Rent Setting 2024/25 report for the consideration of the Executive Committee.

Members were informed that there had been detailed discussions regarding the level at which rents should be set to increase for the financial year 2024/25. It was stated that rent increases capped at a rate of CPI plus 1% which would equate to 7.7% for this financial year. However, following the discussions and due to the Cost of Living crisis it was agreed that the increase should be set at 7% which was compliant with the above requirements.

The increase would help to fund the current refurbishment works that were currently underway. Members were informed that at present there were 15 kitchen and bathrooms a week being fitted within the Council's Housing Stock. In addition to this, the increase would enable the continuation of the gas compliance programme of works. It was reported that the Council's gas compliance rate had recently been at the highest level in the country.

The Committee was advised that the Council's rent levels were set at between 30-50% lower than private rentals and that 78% of the Council's tenants received government benefits to help pay the rental fees. The remaining 22% were working and therefore still received the benefits of lowered rental fees compared to the private rental sector.

Once Members had received the presentation there were some queries regarding what the increase in rental fees would be spent on and whether the increase would be used for the pay award recently awarded to Council Staff. It was reported that 40% of the 7% would be used in this way, however the remaining 60% of the 7% would be used for improvements and further building of Social Housing within the Borough.

In concluding the discussion of this report, Officers noted that there was a typographical error at paragraph 3.11 within the report. The report stated the following:

*'The average rent (48 week basis) for 2024/25 charged will be £104.37 and £161 for social and affordable rent properties respectively.'*

However, it was confirmed that it should read as follows:

*'The average rent (48 week basis) for 2024/25 charged will be **£103.37** and £161 for social and affordable rent properties respectively.'*

**RECOMMENDED that**

**the actual average rent increase for 2024/25 be set as 7%.**

## **72. RECOMMENDATION FROM THE LICENSING COMMITTEE**

The Executive Committee considered the recommendation from the Licensing Committee meeting that took place on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

The Leader thanked the Licensing Committee for the recommendation and expressed that endorsing the recommendation would allow greater flexibility and support to Redditch Taxi Drivers in the future. It was reiterated that an extended free retest period would only be applicable providing the vehicle had a valid MOT certificate.

**RESOLVED that**

**the period during which a taxi or private hire vehicle could be retested at Crossgates Depot without charge be extended from 24 hours to 10 working days, so long as the vehicle has a valid MOT certificate to cover that period of time.**

## **73. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2024-25 TO 2026-27 TRANCHE 1 (FOLLOWING CONSULTATION)**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-25 to 2026-27 Tranche 1 (following consultation) report.

The Committee was informed that this report was almost the same as the report considered in October 2023 prior to consultation. It outlined that the Council set out a 3-year Medium Term Financial Plan every year, with the final Council Tax Resolution being approved by Full Council in February.

Due to the Cost of Living Crisis and inflationary pressures the process had been more difficult than in previous years and therefore the MTFP had been split into two tranches.

Members were informed that the approved Tranche 1 position included some base assumptions which were as follows:

- Council Tax – Figures assume the full 1.99% allowable increase over all years of the 3 year MTFP and no increase in numbers of properties.
- Business Rates Increases – business rates assumed no growth in the base.
- New Homes Bonus/Government Grants – It was assumed that levels would be the same as previous years.
- Pension Fund assumptions took into account the latest triennial valuation which was received in September 2022.

The following “generic” pressures and savings were included in Tranche 1:

- The impact of the 2023/4 pay award had been considered. This was an estimated increase of £805,000, however, the Council had already accounted for a pay award of 2% which reduced this amount to £575,000.
- There were savings following budgets set in 23/4 not being required as inflation had reduced therefore the utilities budget reduced by £228,000 a year and the Inflation budget of £260,000 could also be released.
- The £1,140k utilities reserve was transferred to the General Fund.

- A 7% increase in fees and charges had been approved (apart from Dial a Ride where registration fees were reduced from £16.50 to £15, but journey fees increased by £1).
- Inflation on fees and charges is 2% in 2025/6 and 2026/7.

Departmental pressures were also highlighted for Members attention:

- There was presently a target of £500,000 for the reclaiming of Benefit overpayments. Following receipt of more accurate information and processes this amount would now only deliver £300,000 of income.
- The Council's Carbon pledge was to a carbon neutral position on the fleet over time. The £20,000 increase in budget allowed for, prices dependent, a 30% use of HVO fuel and an estimated savings of 154 tonnes of greenhouse gases from the fleet.
- The HR structure reported into one post. This funding added a second senior post to relieve pressure in this service area.

Finally, it was reported that the appendices to the report set out all saving proposals and also included a feedback form on the Tranche 1 proposals. To date there had been no feedback forms received.

As highlighted earlier in the meeting, this report was reviewed by the Budget Scrutiny Working Group on the 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2024 whereby no recommendations were made to the proposals contained within the report.

Following the presentation of the report some Members queried whether it was prudent to release the Utilities reserves given that the price of energy was increasing once again. Officers explained that although this was the case across many areas, the Council was part of an energy buying consortium where the cost of purchasing energy was lower and provided a better deal than those paying for energy individually.

There were also some queries in respect of the increase in cost of Dial-a- Ride services. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling explained that the decision to increase the journey fees had been from the service and had not been a Finance decision. He read out the following statement which had been received in respect of this:

*“All trips are increased by £1 but we reduce the registration fee back to £15. (The current charge is £4 per single journey with concessionary pass and £16.50 for the registration fee).*

*Based on current registered customers we would only lose £688 per annum in the registration fee money but increase income through fees and charges by £18k per annum. To note this still does not make the service pay for itself. Full cost recovery is nearer £9.50 per journey. As Members will be aware from the new Council priorities, reducing the cost of the Dial A Ride has been set out in the plan and Officers are currently working on this proposal through increased income generation by increasing the number of daily passenger details through a more efficient delivery method.*

*The rationale for this £1 increase (which equates to 20%) is that many of the Community Transport (CT) schemes charge an admin fee per journey. By increasing our journey charges, we would be more in line with what other CT schemes charge. We find the customers who use us regularly take up a lot of despatchers time booking, changing, cancelling appointments so we can recoup some of this by charging more per journey. All customers pay the same registration fee however many journeys they take, which can seem unfair to those customers who don't use us as often or can't get booked on their requests due to the regular group bookings using up the slots/taking priority.*

*Regarding the cost being closer to a taxi fare, the Dial A Ride services offers the following additional benefits to service users*

- A wheelchair accessible vehicle, that allow direct access on the vehicle via a ramp.*
- A front door service, with drivers assisting service users to secure their property and to assist with carrying shopping etc.*
- The mental well-being aspect of travelling with other services users and building connections and friendships. This reduces loneliness and improves mental well-being.”*

In respect of the target of £500k for the reclaiming of Benefit overpayments it was noted that this had been amended following more accurate information being received and was attributed to residents becoming more familiar with completing the appropriate forms when informing the Council of a change in circumstances.

**RECOMMENDED that:**

- 1) 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) These inputs had 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) An initial Tranche of savings proposals, as set out within the report and the associated Savings Proposal Document, had been published on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 2023 and any feedback will be considered by Executive at this meeting on the 9th January prior to seeking approval at Council on the 29th January 2024.**
- 4) That fees and charges be increased by 7% as part of these proposals.**
- 5) Tranche 2 of this process will add further information such as the Local Government Settlement to give a final financial position for the Council.**

**74. 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 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023 be noted.**

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

During consideration of this item, Members noted that there were two recommendations that had been made by the Budget Scrutiny Working Group at the meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2023, which were subsequently endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023.



These two recommendations were debated and endorsed by the Executive Committee. This followed the agreement of these recommendations at the Executive Committee meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2023, as detailed in the minutes of that meeting at Minute Item 60 – Executive Committee Meeting – 5<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

## 76. **PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT BUSINESS CASE**

The Technical Services Manager, WRS presented the Planning and Environmental Enforcement Business Case. During the presentation the following was highlighted for Members' attention:

- A number of issues had been experienced by the Council in respect of Planning and Environmental enforcement in the past. These included difficulty in the recruitment of experienced and skilled officers. It is considered that WRS Officers had the necessary skills to provide effective enforcement on behalf of the Council. The service would include triaging of enforcement matters, proactive enforcement and legal and administrative support. In addition to this by utilising the expertise of WRS in enforcement matters, it would allow benefit from increased knowledge in areas such as injunctions and more skills in complex enforcement matters when multiple breaches had occurred; such as breaches that included both noise and importation of soil.
- There was currently a backlog in enforcement cases at the Council and this proposed extra resource would provide a means by which to reduce the backlog over a period of time.
- There would be an increase in resource allocated to 'enviro-crimes' such as fly-tipping and dog fouling, which were two areas of concern for both the Council and residents of the Borough.

In proposing the recommendations, Members stated that this proposal was an opportunity for the Council to enforce in a proactive manner and that the knowledge and skills offered by WRS was a key benefit to accepting these proposals.

Some Members were keen to better understand the process of approval of the report going forward. It was confirmed that this

report was due to be considered at the Full Council meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2024. It was also due to be considered at a Bromsgrove District Council Cabinet meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2024 and then at the Full Council meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024. Following the outcomes of these meetings the report would be considered at the next meeting of the WRS Board where all Member Councils would be asked to endorse the proposals.

## **RECOMMENDED that**

- 1) The Business case be pursued with the intention to bring together the enforcement functions within Environmental Services and Planning and associated current budget within the Shared Regulatory Service provided by WRS.**
- 2) An additional £23,400 annually be agreed to fund the service to meet the level of demand in Planning Enforcement.**
- 3) An additional £15,260 be agreed to fund 1.6 FTE additional (Grade 6) resource to support the work in tackling the backlog of Planning Enforcement cases each year for the next two years only.**
- 4) An additional £7,537.50 be agreed to fund 0.25 FTE additional (Grade 4) resource for the customer service resource element of fly-tipping, littering and enviro-crime.**
- 5) An additional £21,650 be agreed to fund 0.5 FTE additional (Grade 6) resource to support the work on enforcement of fly-tipping, littering and enviro-crime.**

(During the consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed relating to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and information relating to consultations and negotiations, including contemplated consultations and negotiations, in respect of labour relations

matters. However, there is no exempt information in this minute item).

## 77. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

**RESOLVED that:**

**Under S100 A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following matters on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12 of the said act, as amended.**

- **Minute Item No. 78 – Land at Upper Norgrove**
- **Minute Item No. 79 - Appointment of Design Team and Project Managers – Towns Fund Schemes**

## 78. LAND AT UPPER NORRGROVE

The Interim Deputy Chief Executive presented the report in respect of the Land at Upper Norgrove.

The Committee was reminded that the site had been allocated for housing as part of the Council's Local Plan in 2017. A further update report had been considered by the Executive Committee of the proposals in July 2021. There had been some negotiations with neighbouring landowners regarding the development / disposal of the property. However, these negotiations had not been successful, and a market exercise was undertaken to market the Council's land as a standalone development opportunity.

It was reported that an offer had been received from Bloor Homes Ltd and that it was recommended that this offer be accepted.

Following the presentation of the report, some Members queried why the Council was not proposing to build its own Social Housing on this site. It was stated that as this was a large site it was not prudent for the Council to undertake such a large project, and that it was more appropriate to continue to build new homes, such as the 19-house development recently completed, in pockets of Council owned land.

## **RECOMMENDED that**

- 1) The Council dispose of the above site to Bloor Homes Ltd on the basis of the offer received as described in Appendix 1 to this report.**
- 2) Authority be delegated to the Head of Legal Democratic and Property Services and the Section 151 Officer to implement the disposal.**

(During the consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed relating to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

## **79. APPOINTMENT OF DESIGN TEAM AND PROJECT MANAGERS - TOWNS FUND SCHEMES**

The Interim Deputy Chief Executive presented the Appointment of Design Team and Project Managers - Towns Fund Schemes report for Members' consideration.

It was reported that a tender exercise had been undertaken to appoint a Design Team and Project Managers for the Towns Fund Schemes in 2023. The tenders in respect of the multi discipline design for the Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (DMIC) had been evaluated on a ratio of 70% Quality and 30% Price. Of the quality evaluation the weightings were evaluated as follows:

- 30% was weighted to the Design Team Selection and Relevant Experience.
- 22% was weighted to Building Services, Pre- Construction Management, and Cost Management.
- 18% was weighted to Stakeholder Management, Environmental Sustainability, and Social Value.

A similar process was for the appointment of Project Managers for the projects.

Following the presentation of the report some Members queried the exact function of the DMIC and whether this was simply office space. It was stated that this would be a mix of office, manufacturing and design space for businesses (both start up and established) and centres of learning could also utilise it to upskill local residents in order for them to enter jobs in the future. It was also explained that there was a need for this kind of centre in the Borough as Redditch had a strong history of manufacturing skills but no such site at present which enabled an increase of these skills.

Some Members raised concerns regarding the funding of these projects and whether there was sufficient funding available to progress them. It was noted that funding streams were being looked at and that further details would be available in due course.

Members were reminded that the Council was the responsible body for these projects and that sign off by the Interim Section 151 Officer would be sought at every step of the process. It was also noted that this report sought only to agree the appointment of the design team and project managers and was not a report that was requesting additional funding for the projects.

#### **RESOLVED that**

- 1) That AHR be approved as the Design contractor for the DMIC following a tender process.**
- 2) That Gardiner and Theobald be approved as Project Managers for the Digital Manufacturing Innovation Centre and the New Town Square projects following a tender process.**

(During the consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed relating to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).