

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Salman Akbar (Mayor), Councillor Karen Ashley (Deputy Mayor) and Councillors Imran Altaf, Joe Baker, Juliet Barker Smith, Joanne Beecham, Juma Begum, Brandon Clayton, Luke Court, Matthew Dormer, James Fardoe, Peter Fleming, Alex Fogg, Andrew Fry, Lucy Harrison, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Chris Holz, 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, Sue Hanley and Guy Revans

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

27. WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all present to the meeting.

28. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

30. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Monday 26th June 2023 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Mayor.

31. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following announcements were made:

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Chair

a) The Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor advised that a record of the civic engagements which had been attended by him and the Deputy Mayor since the previous meeting had been included in agenda pack 2 for Members' consideration. A particular highlight had been a visit to the twin town of Auxerre which was celebrating its 800th anniversary of emancipation, and the Mayor passed on the good wishes of the people of Auxerre to the people of Redditch.

b) The Leader's Announcements

The Leader explained that he had attended meetings of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Board, the WMCA Economic Growth Investment and Housing and Land Delivery Boards. He had also attended a recent meeting of business leaders in Redditch which had focused on skills.

The Leader invited the Council to join him in thanking all the voluntary groups who had organised events such as the Astwood Bank Carnival and Food Fair and the Redditch Carnival, all of which had been excellent community events.

c) The Chief Executive's Announcements

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

32. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 9)

Four questions on notice had been submitted for this meeting.

Matchborough Centre

Councillor Jane Spilsbury asked the Leader: "Can the leader confirm the timeline and the details of the communication strategy for public consultation on the regeneration of Matchborough centre?"

The Leader responded that consultation for the possible redevelopment of Winyates and Matchborough centres was still on going. At the end of this or any future consultation period, comments were welcomed from interested members of the public or stakeholders until a scheme was finally agreed. It was not known when the scheme would be finally agreed as there were still many issues to be considered and funding to be secured.

Councillor Spilsbury asked a supplementary question about whether the Leader agreed that the residents of Matchborough and

Winyates deserved to be consulted and engaged on potential changes which would significantly affect the quality of their lives.

The Leader responded that he agreed and reiterated that the consultation was still ongoing and officers had visited Matchborough as part of this. He had spoken to business owners in the area as part of this and wanted better outcomes for residents. Until funding was secured it was not possible to commit to a timescale.

Redditch as a Place to Live

Councillor Joe Baker asked the Leader:

“What is the Leader’s opinion on the recent national reports that Redditch is one of the worst places to live, as was reported in the press?”

The Leader responded that something similar was in the media last year and it appeared that the claims were now being used by a company attempting to sell its products. The Leader quoted from an article in the Birmingham Mail, December 22, 2022, which carried a story based on information by the Office of National Statistics, that Redditch was the unhappiest place to live. The article had then referred to the unveiling of major plans to renovate the town centre and securing more than £16 million of government funding for this, which was viewed as positive.

The Leader refuted the claim that Redditch was stressed or unhappy. When talking to people, he found that Redditch had some of the most passionate people who were committed to making the town and the whole Borough even better.

The Leader then gave examples of notes in the Local Portrait of Redditch in the adopted Local Plan, including a significant black and ethnic minority population who contributed to the diversity and culture of Redditch, high levels of open space, the town’s history, a free-flowing road network, with relatively little congestion and a huge network of pedestrian footways, unemployment which was lower than that of the West Midlands and across Great Britain, one of the country’s top 20 shopping centres and lower than average house prices. The investment secured through the Town’s Deal for a digital innovation centre, new plaza, and improved public realm would help residents, businesses and visitors to upskill, socialise and move around the town to other areas of improvement including the new hub in the Town hall and the new train station site.

Councillor Baker asked a supplementary question, whether the Leader felt the money earmarked for the town centre, train station and innovation hub could be better spent on improving the lives of residents. The Leader responded that there was much to be proud

of in Redditch and that the money should be spent on the projects it was aiming to deliver.

Relocation of Redditch Library

Ms. M. Bish asked the Leader:

“Bearing in mind that:

1.the space to be used by the library could generate an annual rent of £180,000pa if rented to businesses and charities that support the hub idea, giving Redditch people a helping hand to get out of debt like Home Start, Age UK, business and finance advisers and letting agents, with that income used every year in promotion of events or business starter grants;

2. the council is acting against the advice of the Commons Environmental Audit Committee which states that buildings should be refurbished, not demolished. Our town centre regeneration plan, demolishes the police and fire stations, Community House, and the library, equating to over 10,000 sq metres of floor space so The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations require an environmental impact assessment open to public scrutiny and consultation including demolition and reconstruction impacts, and decommissioning the library’s solar panels . Every layer of bricks and cement in the new 600 sq metre rebuild generates 250 Kg of carbon emissions in their manufacture, add on transport of materials, manpower and running of machinery The fountains will require power to run them and chemicals to clean them causing ongoing environmental impact every year.

3. The council has just discussed an increase to their budget of 20% (£1 million) for the rest of the town hall refurb due to increased building costs. This equates to £1300 for every square metre of town hall space. This increase applies too to the library, where only 2.2% annual inflation and 10% for all contingencies has been applied. There will be a deficit of more than £420,000 which, as the council will already have a million pound debt, the people of Redditch cannot afford. The million requires a 40 year repayment period – a whole working life. By renting out the library space you can reduce the interest the people of Redditch will have to pay .

4.You can improve flow between the Kingfisher and Alcester Street, by adding a glazed roof to the land surrounding the sides and rear of the library and signs saying Kingfisher Centre at the new entrances by the Post Office and library at a quarter of the cost. You retain the trade from the 12,000 library footfalls a year and can add more with covered events – markets, competitions, and displays in this roofed area which will create year round trade, unlike the fountains, which will be seasonal. These events will generate council income, and create pedestrian flow.

5. Our government's debt is more than 100% of the GDP, we need councils to retain their assets and generate income from them rather than passing cash from one public body to another, leaking money with each move, or selling assets off for little gain making our taxes rise and rise.

6. The project management plan said detailed designs of the whole redevelopment would be complete by Jan 23 but no plans so far have dealt with the 1:13 slope. Chairs are unstable on this gradient and pubs difficult to access. A fountain can be built on a slope, but allowing for the 7ft drop along the length of the Kingfisher Centre, eating areas can't without creating access problems to the centre.

If detailed plans don't yet exist, the scheme won't be completed on time. You told us we would then have to pay the full cost of more than £4.6 million. Money Redditch council has not got and cannot generate.

Why is the council still considering moving the library when, if there is any uncertainty in successful completion on time, the sensible course of action is to apply to government with a better, cheaper plan, a new time scale, and an accurate costing before beginning work?

The Leader replied that he considered it would be helpful to meet with Ms Bish with appropriate Council officers to deal with the detail in her questions and he invited her to let him know when would be convenient to do that.

The Leader added that moving the library and improving the public realm in the Town Centre was set out in the Towns Fund vision which itself was consulted with the Public and approved for funding by the Government in 2021. Movement of the library was part of those plans, pending a full consultation, which was undertaken by the County Council during 2022-23. The movement into the Town Hall Hub was agreed by County Council Cabinet in July 2023.

Reference to Public Services by Councillors

Councillor Juliet Barker-Smith asked the Leader:

“Would the Leader agree that when councillors are speaking to residents, it would be more appropriate and respectful to refer to the police, council officers and contractors as "our team" rather than their own, personal team, (e.g. when speaking about the police, "I'll get "my team" to sort this problem out.)”

The Leader replied that in his view different councillors would have different ways of expressing themselves when trying their best to help residents and businesses. He gave an example that he was comfortable with saying “our” team rather than “my” team. The key

matter was that the council and our partners all did what they could to enable constituents to access the help they needed.

Councillor Barker Smith asked the Leader a supplementary question as to whether he agreed Councillors should respect the impartiality of local authority and other public sector officers. The Leader agreed and asked that if there were specific instances where a member had acted inappropriately, then they were raised with him.

33. MOTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 11)

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

Community Events in the Summer.

Councillor Sharon Harvey submitted the following Motion for consideration:

“That the Council records a vote of thanks to all the community groups and organisations who have organised public events throughout the summer.”

Councillor Harvey proposed the Motion and it was seconded by Councillor Joe Baker.

In proposing the Motion Councillor Harvey referred to the wide variety of events which had taken place over the summer in Redditch, including the Astwood Bank and Redditch Carnivals and the free event of the REDI centre Open Day which was held to improve residents' wellbeing and the Beach On the Green, held by Batchley Support Group with the support of the BID.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Baker highlighted the Forge Mill Heritage Day which was one of the many assets in the Town. He referred to the many Community Groups who had made the events happen for the benefit of the town.

During consideration of the Motion members referred to events which had taken place across the town over the summer. They expressed their appreciation for the work done by volunteers and communities as part of this and their pride in the town and for its residents. They also referred to events which were due to be held in the autumn. The Leader suggested that the Council's thanks might be given to community groups on an annual basis. The proposer and seconder agreed to this being added to the motion.

It was also suggested that representatives of community groups could be invited to the annual Mayor making when their endeavours could also be recognised.

RESOLVED that

the Council records a vote of thanks to all the community groups and organisations who have organised public events throughout the summer and Council's thanks be given to community groups on an annual basis.

Live Animals as Prizes

Councillor Andy Fry had submitted the following Motion on Notice:

“Redditch Borough Council will not allow any live animals to be given as prizes on land we own or community centres we have an interest in. The RSPCA have voiced their concerns over many years and many Councils have taken similar action as they are aware the fish are neglected.”

Councillor Andy Fry proposed the Motion and it was seconded by Councillor Monica Stringfellow.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Fry referred to the RSPCA campaign to encourage people that giving live animals as prizes should be phased out. Although the practice was less common, he considered the Council should lead the way in ensuring it did not take place at events on its land. In many cases prize winners were not prepared to take on the responsibility of caring for a live animal which could incur unexpected costs.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Stringfellow referred to research which showed that fish were kept in less than suitable circumstances, often not at the correct temperature. After being won they were then kept at best in a bowl or often illegally dumped. It would show compassion to ban the practice.

The Leader suggested that the introduction of a Council policy would be a robust response to the Motion. The proposer and seconder agreed that some words could be added to the end of the Motion “and that this be incorporated in a policy for Council consideration”.

RESOLVED that

Redditch Borough Council will not allow any live animals to be given as prizes on land we own or community centres we have an interest in. The RSPCA have voiced their concerns over many years and many Councils have taken similar action as

they are aware the fish are neglected and that this be incorporated in a policy for Council consideration.

34. CONSTITUTION REVIEW

Councillor Luke Court proposed and Councillor Matt Dormer seconded the recommendation in the report relating to updating the Policy Framework.

Councillor Joe Baker reported that previous concerns about the content of the Framework had been addressed to Members' satisfaction.

RESOLVED that

the Policy Framework be updated, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, to remove reference to policies that no longer exist or which are considered in an alternative forum and to add reference to the HRA 30-year Business Plan and the Housing Asset Management Strategy.

35. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Councillor Joe Baker proposed, Councillor Harvey seconded that Cllr Ian Woodall be appointed as Chair of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee and Cllr Jane Spilsbury as Vice Chair. In doing so both Councillors thanked Councillor Juma Begum for her service as Chair of the Committee.

RESOLVED that

Councillor Ian Woodall be appointed Chair and Councillor Jane Spilsbury be appointed Vice-Chair of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee.

36. OUTSIDE BODY APPOINTMENTS

The Council considered strategic appointments to outside bodies which were part of consideration across the North Worcestershire District Councils.

RESOLVED that

- a) Councillor Matt Dormer be appointed to Worcestershire Local Transport Board and Councillor Karen May from Bromsgrove District Council as the substitute member; and**
- b) Councillor Marcus Hart from Wyre Forest District Council be appointed to the Worcestershire Local**

Enterprise Partnership and Councillor Karen May from Bromsgrove District Council as the substitute member.

37. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Members considered recommendations that had been agreed at meetings of the Executive Committee held on 25th July and 12th September 2023.

Worcestershire Housing Strategy 2040

Members expressed their thanks to the former Chief Executive for the work involved in bringing a report to the Executive Committee. Some members expressed the view that whilst they supported the proposals, there were concerns about the impact of the costs of retrofit in the current economic climate.

Approvals to Spend

During consideration of these recommendations, members referred to discussion at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the concerns which had been raised at that meeting and notified to the Executive Committee.

Draft Treasury Management Outturn Report 2022/23

Members considered and agreed the recommendations from the Executive Committee.

Future of Brick Arched Former Railway Bridge, Green Lane, Studley

Members welcomed the actions proposed by the Executive Committee.

Disposal of Long Leasehold Interest at Woodfield Close, Abbeydale, Redditch

Members supported the proposals to dispose of the long lease as recommended.

Housing development proposal – Loxley Close, Church Hill

Cllr Baker expressed concerns about the building site as it was on a flood plain and his reservations about the potential for a ‘two tier’ rent system in the town. However, members recognised the need for social housing and the contribution to the housing stock made by this development.

Councillor Warhust explained that the planning process had considered the flooding issues and the proposed development had been adjusted accordingly.

Town Hall Refurbishment – Final Decision

The Council considered the recommendations from the Executive Committee meeting on 12th September to increase the Town Hall Refurbishment Capital Budget to £6.2 million; fund the £1 million difference from the original approved budget through PWLB debt financed via the additional income, over and above what is in the Medium Term Financial Plan being delivered; and to delegate authority to the Interim Director of Finance and Resources to enter into the consequential contractual arrangements.

During debate of this item the following were the main points made:

- The proposed Hub would bring organisations together to benefit people of the town
- Whilst in support of the Hub concept some members expressed the view that as consultation and petitions had demonstrated public opposition to relocation of the library then this should not proceed
- There were alternative uses for the additional £1m proposed to be allocated to the project, which could be applied to dealing with the current financial challenges. Alternatives suggested for spending included improving the housing stock and increasing provision of community facilities
- Lessons should have been learned from the Tech1 project and applied to the Town hall refurbishment
- Some members expressed concern that the current proposed total cost of £10.6m would increase still further, which in their view would put the Council's finances in jeopardy, and sought guarantees that there would be no further increases
- A member highlighted that financial implications in the report to the Executive Committee had identified £400k annual savings as a result of the Hub. It was suggested that although the final figures involved borrowing an additional £1m, the net savings were now projected to be £410k per year for the revenue budget, which would not be ring fenced.

Councillor Joe Baker requested a recorded name vote and names were recorded as follows:

Members Voting FOR the proposal to add to the budget for the Town Hall Refurbishment:

Councillors Salman Akbar, Imran Altaf, Karen Ashley, Joanne Beecham, Brandon Clayton, Luke Court, Matthew Dormer, Peter

Fleming, Alex Fogg, Lucy Harrison, Chris Holz, Anthony Lovell, Emma Marshall, Gemma Monaco, Timothy Pearman and Craig Warhurst (16)

Members voting AGAINST the proposal:

Councillors Joe Baker, Juliet Barker-Smith, Juma Begum, James Fardoe, Andy Fry, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Joanna Kane, Sid Khan, Kerrie Miles, Jane Spilsbury, Monica Stringfellow and Ian Woodall (13)

Abstentions (0)

The proposal was carried.

Finance and Performance Monitoring Report - Quarter 1 2023/24

During the consideration of this item a member asked for confirmation of some details relating to the 2023/24 budget, including whether reserves were being used to meet the budget for 22/23 and whether efficiency targets were met. In response the portfolio holder reported that the use of reserves had been as planned and that good progress was being made on efficiencies.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meetings of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday, 25th July and Tuesday 12th September 2023 be approved and all recommendations adopted.

38. URGENT BUSINESS - RECORD OF DECISIONS

The Mayor advised that one urgent decision had been taken since the previous Council meeting, in respect of the appointment of an Interim Head of Paid Service.

39. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

There was no urgent business for consideration on this occasion.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.38 pm