

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Joe Baker (Chair), Councillor Sharon Harvey (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Juliet Barker Smith, Bill Hartnett, Wanda King, Jen Snape, Jane Spilsbury, Monica Stringfellow and Ian Woodall

Officers:

Peter Carpenter, Rachel Egan, Rebecca Green, Georgina Harris, Doug Henderson, Helen Mole, Simon Parry and Guy Revans

Democratic Services Officers:

Jo Gresham

88. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence from Members on this occasion.

89. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

90. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader highlighted that, following consultation with Midlands Net Zero Hub as consortium lead for the Warm Homes Local Grant, Redditch Borough Council were looking to re-evaluate the delivery of the Warm Homes Local Grant in Redditch. The report at item seven of the agenda (Minute No 94) was therefore withdrawn and was not debated at this meeting. It was noted that it would be bought back to a future meeting of the Executive Committee for consideration.

The Leader advised that at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10th March 2025, Members pre-scrutinised Future Cemetery Provision, UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Chair

2025/26 and the Redditch Council Plan scheduled for consideration at the Executive Committee meeting.

Members were advised that at the end of their discussions, the Committee endorsed the recommendations in the reports but did not propose any further recommendations.

Prior to the Executive Committee meeting, the Budget Scrutiny Working Group had pre-scrutinised the Quarter Three Revenue and Performance Monitoring 2024/25 and the Finance Recovery Programme Report. Again, the Group did not propose any recommendations on these items for the Executive Committee's consideration.

On behalf of the Executive Committee, the Leader thanked Members of both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Budget Scrutiny Working Group for their hard work in pre-scrutinising these reports.

91. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 25th February 2025 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

92. FUTURE CEMETERY PROVISION

The Environmental Services Manager presented the Future Cemetery Provision report for the consideration of the Executive Committee.

In doing so it was reported that, following the elections in May 2024, Members requested that Officers identified potential alternatives for burial provision within the Borough. This was undertaken and a potential new site for burial provision was identified on Land North of Morrisons and West of the B4497, B98 0JD.

If this site was to be investigated further, it would still result in the need for further burial provision whilst the investigation took place. It was therefore proposed within the report that a site within the Abbey Cemetery and Redditch Crematorium, previously used for

scattering of ashes, be repurposed to provide ten years of further burial provision.

A further proposal contained within the report was that burial provision be considered as part of the development of the Redditch Local Plan which was currently underway.

Members thanked Officers for their hard work in respect of this sensitive matter. It was acknowledged that the use of the previous scattering area at the Abbey Cemetery and Redditch Crematorium could be upsetting for those who had used this area previously. However, it was confirmed that there would be detailed searches of records and communications provided to those residents who had used this site previously. These communications would be made through social media, websites, and notices posted at the location to inform people of the proposed future use. Residents would be listened to and reassured that this would be an open and transparent process throughout. An appropriate memorial could also be considered at this location if required in the future.

Members were pleased that future burial provision would be included as part of the development of the Local Plan as it was just as important as the provision of schools and health care when developing the local area. This would hopefully provide a long-term solution for the future.

RECOMMENDED that

a process begin of incorporating new burial provision within the new Borough of Redditch Local Plan.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Land located at the current Abbey Cemetery site, used previously as an ashes scattering area be utilised for earth burial provision for an interim period of up to ten years commencing in January 2027.**
- 2) A review be commissioned of the potential to use the site at Land North of Morrisons and West of the B4497, B98 0JD for burial provision in the long-term.**

93. DATA STRATEGY (INCL DATA STANDARDS POLICY)

The Business Improvement Manager – Business Transformation presented the Data Strategy (including Data Standards Policy) for Members' consideration.

In doing so, it was highlighted that the Data Standards Policy would provide a foundation and guidance to help safeguard the Council's data assets. This was essential in order to maintain consistency, quality and compliance within legal and regulatory requirements. In addition, it would provide a framework in which to adhere to data security measures, collaboration across services resulting in greater trust and transparency amongst stakeholders.

Members were advised of the governance structure contained within the Data Standards Policy and it was reported that there was a Systems and Data (SAD) Governance Board along with a SAD Governance Group which reported to the Board. There were several projects due to be undertaken which included Systems Procurement, Data Standards and Data Stewards projects.

A group of fourth tier managers within the organisation had carried out an assessment of the Council's Data Maturity against a Local Government Association (LGA) Assessment Tool. The results of this assessment had indicated that the Council currently had a Data Maturity score of 2.7 which equated to Level Three within the LGA's scoring matrix. This meant that Redditch Borough Council was 'developing' its 'capacity and capabilities in terms of data'. It was noted that although this was satisfactory in terms of where the Council should be at the start of this process it eventually needed to be at Level Four. This would require a review of six or seven systems across the organisation which focussed on key identifier fields across all Council data systems, for example Unique Property Reference Number (UPRN), address, postcode, name and customer ID.

An outline of the Data Standards, Data Stewards and Systems Procurement projects were provided to Members along with the timelines of these projects. This would not be an easy task and would take at least two years to complete. However, the result would be that the Council could collect, use and appropriately share accurate data providing a standard to support a 'single source of truth' or 'golden record' for Council customers.

It was reported that an estimated £10,000 per system was needed to start to address data cleansing issues within core Systems, which held almost 90 per cent of Council data.

Following the presentation of the report, Members expressed that they were pleased that this policy had been developed and that it was important that the Council held accurate records for its residents.

Members were also pleased that the Council had assessed itself realistically in terms of where they currently were in terms of Data Maturity and queried how the levels would be monitored. Officers stated that this information would be included in the Quarterly reports considered regularly by Members.

In terms of Local Government reorganisation, it was noted that this project was very timely as whatever the outcome was for Local Authorities in the future it would be necessary for all Councils to have accurate data. It was noted that some neighbouring Authorities had the same systems as Redditch Borough Council so it would be possible to integrate with other Councils as necessary.

RESOLVED that

that the proposed Data Standards Policy be agreed and the guidance policy be implemented for all employees.

94. WARM HOMES LOCAL GRANTS FUNDING AND RESOURCES

As detailed in the preamble above (Minute No 90), the Warm Homes Local Grants Funding and Resources report was not debated at this meeting and would be considered at a future meeting of the Executive Committee.

95. UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND 2025/26

The UK Prosperity Fund Manager presented the UK Shared Prosperity Fund 2025 – 2026 for Members' consideration.

In doing so it was highlighted that there had been a one-year extension of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) for the financial year 2025 – 2026 at a reduced rate of funding. This had resulted in Redditch Borough Council being allocated £818,536.

It was reported that there had been some further changes in the UKSPF for this financial year, in that the list of fifty plus interventions had been replaced with five themes and twelve sub-themes.

The Investment Plan for the funding had been aligned with the priorities outlined by Members and included support for communities and the Voluntary Sector, improvement of the Town Centre, Parks and Green Spaces and the Cost of Living. Furthermore, there had been consultation with the Redditch Town Deal Board who also supported the priority of investment in upskilling, youth unemployment and support for local businesses as key priorities. Members were pleased that this support had been provided.

It was noted that one of the proposed recommendations contained within the report would also allow any funds that had not been spent as per the Investment Plan to be reallocated following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration and Governance. This would ensure that all available monies were spent within the deadline, providing the best outcome for Redditch and its residents.

Members welcomed this report and felt that the investment would help those communities and groups that needed it most. It was further noted that the support was welcomed for those young people who were not in employment, education or training (NEET) particularly as many of these young people were care-leavers. Members queried how this support would be provided, and it was reported that Worcestershire County Council would provide this service through the Redditch Youth Hub, who already had strong support of this client group.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Investment Plan be approved; and**
- 2) Authority to vary the Investment Plan, in order to maximise the use of the grant be delegated to the Assistant Director Regeneration & Property following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration and Governance.**

96. REDDITCH COUNCIL PLAN

The Policy Manager presented the Redditch Council Plan for the consideration of the Executive Committee.

This Plan had been developed with the Executive alongside Officers and the Local Government Association (LGA) who had assisted at the beginning of the process. It was proposed that there would be an implementation plan that sat alongside the Council Plan. It was anticipated that the Council Plan would be reviewed annually and key objectives and outcomes measured as part of the Quarterly monitoring reporting regime.

Members were further advised on the potential impact on this Plan as a result of the proposed Local Government reorganisation. Therefore, there would need to be amendments made as necessary, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration and Governance.

The Leader sincerely thanked the Policy Manager and the Corporate Leadership Team for their work on such a positive process which had resulted in a comprehensive new Council Plan, that provided new initiatives and improvements for Redditch and its residents for the future.

There were some comments from Members in respect of the Plan. Some Members requested that further information regarding the cultural activities within the Borough be included in order to demonstrate the rich cultural events on offer for residents.

Members also requested that any comments on the design, such as layout, photographs and colour palette of the proposed Council Plan document, be provided to the Policy Manager following the meeting.

It was queried how the new Council Plan would be disseminated. Members were advised that once it was approved communications would be released using the Council's usual channels such as social media.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) The Council Plan be approved.**

- 2) Authority be delegated to the Chief Executive, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration and Governance in respect of any changes as a result of the Local Government reorganisation.**

97. MEMBERS WARD BUDGET SCHEME

The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer presented the Members' Ward Budget Scheme for the consideration of the Executive Committee.

Members were informed that the proposal for the pilot scheme was that each Councillor would receive £2,000 for the 2025 - 2026 financial year, and the following two financial years. As a result of the new Local Government reorganisation proposal, it was likely that this would be a one-time scheme.

Members could recommend allocating funds to projects and / or services within their ward and across wider communities across the Borough. Members could also join with other Members to "pool" their Ward Funds for specific Council wide projects and initiatives to make the overall sums greater.

It was highlighted that the required forms to be completed were contained within the report and that a clear statement would be required as to how the funds would be spent. In order to ensure a robust process was followed it would be necessary for Members to declare any Pecuniary Interests and any Other Disclosable Interests as part of the application stage. If necessary, Legal advice could be sought to provide any clarification in this matter.

Any payments would be made electronically to recipients of the funding in order to provide a necessary audit trail. No cash transactions would be made for funding payments.

Members were advised that the funds needed to be spent within the financial year to which they were allocated. If it was unlikely that the funding would be spent during this period, Officers would need to be notified in December of the relevant financial year.

The scheme would be subject to the Quarterly Performance monitoring reports which were regularly considered by Members.

Members commented that this was a positive scheme for the residents of Redditch and communities. Through the robust process proposed within the report there would be no opportunity for fraud or abuse.

It was noted that the pre-election period (purdah) for the Worcestershire County Council elections was due to start imminently. Therefore, no applications would be processed prior to these elections on May 1st 2025.

RECOMMENDED that

the Ward Budget Scheme be agreed.

**98. QUARTER 3 REVENUE AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING
2024/25**

The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer presented the Quarter Three Revenue and Performance Monitoring 2024/25.

It was reported that overall, the Council was currently forecasting a full year revenue overspend of £138,000 at Quarter Three, an improvement of £161,000 from Quarter Two.

Several further changes were also reported from Quarter Two to Quarter Three. These were as follows:

- An overspend in Environmental Services of £189,000 – this was largely due to an increase in Place Team spending.
- An overspend in Financial Services of £187,000 due to agency staff costs.
- An overspend in Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services of £119,000 – this was mainly due to the variances on Planning Applications income compared to budget.

On 31st December 2024, the Council had £13.5m short term investments held and no short-term borrowing.

In terms of the Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (DMIC) it was reported that the plans were now up and running and that a bid was underway to Birmingham City Council for the funding of £2.425m which had previously been allocated to Redditch Borough

Council by the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) before being disbanded. This would help fund the DMIC project going forward.

Public Realm works were under construction and had been reported to Members previously, the Town Centre library would not now be relocated to the Town Hall Hub.

As at 31st December 2024, the Council held £14.868m of Earmarked Reserves and £7.475m in the General Fund.

The Housing Revenue Account looked to break even for the financial year. The capital work programme would be accelerated this year as there had been some delays experienced due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Council's Procurement Pipeline included details of contracts expected to be reprocured and new procurement projects expected to be undertaken in the future. There were twenty-three contracts valued between £50,000 and £200,000, ten valued at over £200,000 and ten contracts procured by Redditch on behalf of Bromsgrove District Council. These ten contracts were all related to ICT.

The Policy Manager presented the Performance Measures data for Quarter Three for Members' consideration. It was noted that this was a new way to present the data in a more user-friendly way. It would be used to assess performance and identify areas of improvement. The development of the Power BI dashboard was also underway, and Members would be able to access this via a dashboard in the future providing clear and accurate performance data.

Some measures included within the report were still under development, such as Private Housing and Freedom of Information and Subject Access Request measures due to projects currently underway in these areas. These would continue to be developed for future reports.

All measures were aligned with the Council Plan and linked into the priorities contained within it. Members were informed that the service measures had also been developed as part of the Service Business Planning Framework.

Following consideration of the report Members reported that they were pleased with the outcome of the Finance and Performance monitoring for Quarter Three. The budget pressures that had previously been identified were more positive and the clarity around the allocation of the £2.425m funding allocation from the GBSLEP was welcomed.

It was also noted by the Committee that the more detailed data provided in the performance monitoring offered a more accurate picture of what was going on in the Borough. For example, Anti-Social Behaviour monitoring was included in the report. It seemed that there had been an increase of instances of ASB, however, this had not necessarily been the case. As a new system had been implemented part way through the year which had meant more accurate data had been captured than had been previously. It was noted that tenants who behaved in an anti-social manner were dealt with appropriately and in accordance with the Tenant's Handbook.

Members highlighted the improvement in Gas Safety and Fire Risk Assessments which were currently measured at one hundred per cent. It was hoped that these kinds of areas would continue to improve with the appointment of caretakers for the homes within the Council's management, allowing Tenancy Officers to carry out their roles more effectively.

There were several other areas to note where improvements had been made such as the Damp and Mould Policy recently approved by Members which included the recruitment of a dedicated team to tackle damp and mould issues. It was noted that the relevant Senior Management Team Officers had worked exceptionally hard over recent months to ensure that residents received the best service possible.

Members queried the dip in residents accessing energy advice during this period. The Policy Manager suggested that it could be a seasonal trend, however, they undertook to find out further information from the relevant Officers. It was also questioned how long it took to complete the Disabled Facilities Grant works for those residents who were eligible. Officers would request this information from the relevant service area and would report back to Members accordingly.

Following the detailed consideration of this report, Members stated that it provided clear and transparent information and would provide a useful overview for residents within the Borough now and in the future.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the Balance Sheet Monitoring Position for Quarter Three be noted – which was the Treasury Monitoring Report and required to be reported to Council.**

RESOLVED that

- 2) The current Revenue overspend position of £138k and actions the Council were taking to mitigate this position be noted.**
- 3) The current Capital spending of £4.72m against a budget of £20.5m be noted.**
- 4) The HRA Position be noted.**
- 5) The updated procurements position with any new items over £200,000 to be included on the forward plan.**
- 6) The Quarter Three Performance data for the Period October to December 2024 be noted that this will change over the year to link into the new Administrations priorities.**
- 7) The Council submit a bid for £2.425m to Birmingham City Council for funding allocated to Redditch by Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership to support the Digital Manufacturing Innovation Centre.**

99. FINANCE RECOVERY PROGRAMME REPORT

The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer presented the Finance Recovery Programme Report for the consideration of the Committee. Members were advised that a report much like this was considered at each Audit, Governance and Standards Committee meeting. It was important that the processes put in place following the issuing of the Section 24 Statement were also continued via this half yearly Finance Recovery Plan.

It had been a significant year for the Finance Team. Including the delivery of the Council's Statement of Accounts, with the closure of the accounts for the financial years 2020 – 2021, 2021 – 2022 and 22 – 23 with a 'Disclaimer Opinion' being received and approved for these years. Draft Accounts for the 2023 – 2024 year had been available for public consultation since 17th January 2025. This consultation was due to close on 3rd March 2025. The Accounting Opinion could not be issued until the external auditors had been onboarded. However, it was noted that Officers and Members had all now completed the validation process in just four months, ahead of the six to twelve months projected by Ernst & Young. The key issue still to be resolved across the Country was reported as what were the implications and impact of so many "Disclaimer Opinions" on the sector and individual Councils.

The Committee was informed that the Key Deliverables achieved since the last meeting included the following:

- TechOne had been upgraded to version 24B in February 2025.
- The 2025/6 MTFP process has been completed in both Councils and the 2025/6 process started.
- More Budget Consultation had been addressed in Tranche 1 of the budget.
- Performance Indicators had been reviewed and updated following the Strategic Priority and Service Business Planning sessions.

Members thanked the Deputy Chief Executive and all of the Finance Team for their hard work in respect of this positive report which detailed the significant steps Officers had made during this period.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **Progress made on the financial recovery be noted including:**
 - **Delivery of the Statutory Accounts**
 - **Delivery of Statutory Financial Returns**
 - **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.**

100. 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.

101. TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE HEAD OF LEGAL, DEMOCRATIC AND PROCUREMENT SERVICES PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEETING AND WHICH THE CHAIR, BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, CONSIDERS TO BE OF SO URGENT A NATURE THAT IT CANNOT WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING

There was no Urgent Business on this occasion.

The Meeting commenced at 6.00 pm
and closed at 7.57 pm