

## **MINUTES**

### **Present:**

Councillor Sharon Harvey (Chair), Councillor Jane Spilsbury (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Juliet Barker Smith, Juma Begum, Bill Hartnett, Monica Stringfellow and Ian Woodall

### **Officers:**

Jonathan Elger, Doug Henderson, John Leach, Julie Lorraine, Simon Parry, Andrew Rainbow and Judith Willis

### **Democratic Services Officers:**

Eve Davies

### **85. APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Jen Snape.

### **86. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **87. MINUTES**

#### **RESOLVED that**

**The minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2026 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.**

### **88. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Leader advised that at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2026, Members had pre-scrutinised the following items:

- Minute item no. 90: Repairs and Maintenance and Damp and Mould Policies
- Minute item no. 91: Quarter 3 Housing Improvement Plan Update

Chair

- Minute item no. 92: Quarter 3 Housing Performance

At the end of their discussions, the Committee had endorsed the recommendations contained within the reports.

In advance of the Executive Committee meeting, the Budget Scrutiny Working Group had also pre-scrutinised the Medium Term Financial Plan Budget Report 2026/2027 to 2028/29 including Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy and Investment Strategy.

The group endorsed the recommendations outlined within the report. They had also proposed a further recommendation which would be considered as part of the debate in respect of the budget.

On behalf of the Executive Committee, the Leader thanked the members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Budget Scrutiny Working Group for their hard work in pre-scrutinising these reports prior to the Executive Committee's consideration.

## **89. PET CREMATION SERVICE**

The Environmental Services Manager presented the Pet Cremation Service report.

In doing so, it was explained to the Committee that the proposal sought to introduce a dedicated Pet Cremation Service at Abbey Cemetery. This would expand Redditch Borough Council's current bereavement offer and establish a sustainable new income stream for the Council. Members were advised that the site at Abbey Cemetery was the most suitable location which would most efficiently utilise the current footprint.

The new service was designed to complement the well-established and respected human bereavement service; however, it was clarified that the pet cremation service would be completely separate to the human cremation facilities and assurance was given that there would be no disruption to human funerals.

The Committee was informed that the Council would secure Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) licensing and operate to The Association of Private Pet Cemeteries and Crematoria (APPCC) code of practice.

It was reported that fifty-seven per cent of households in the UK owned pets, in Worcestershire this equated to roughly 148,000 pet-owning households. In terms of the local market landscape,

Members were informed there were three established pet crematoria that operated within a fifteen-to-forty-five-minute drive radius of Redditch. The closest pet cremator was located within ten miles of Redditch Crematorium. The Environmental Services Manager expressed the opinion that this represented a clear opportunity for the Council as there was scope for a high-quality public service alternative locally.

The Committee was advised that financial modelling indicated the service would breakeven by month five and that there would be strong income potential thereafter. It was highlighted that this would allow funds to be released for wider Council priorities.

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council provided the business model for this proposal as they had launched the first Council-owned Pet Cremation Service in 2016 with success.

It was explained that the preferred cremator machine, Addfield PET200, offered ease of operation for staff and support from the supplier as they were UK based.

The key risks were outlined, namely staff unsettlement and public perception. Assurance was given to the Committee that these risks would be mitigated through staff upskilling and transparent communications with the public and stakeholders.

In concluding his presentation, the Environmental Services Manager summarised that this proposal provided a timely, resident-focused operation which would also strengthen the Council's resilience.

After the presentation had been delivered, Members discussed the following points –

- Members welcomed the proposal and thanked the Environmental Services Manager and his team for their work on the report.
- It was noted that the policy had been developed with empathy and understanding at the forefront.
- It was queried whether there had been any consultation or engagement to assess the level of interest for the service. Officers advised that by using the APPCC this would put the Council in contact with vets. The Council would also be working with Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) for the disposal of dangerous dogs as well as bringing animals deceased on the roadside to the facility.

- Members questioned how confident officers were about the financial projections for the service. Officers assured Members that substantial research had been carried out with real-life market examples. Given that the human bereavement service was at a high standard, officers were confident that the pet cremation service would also be a success.
- It was emphasised that communications with residents would be key when launching the service to make clear that the pet cremation service would be completely separate to the human cremation facilities. Officers advised that they planned to share video footage of the facilities as well as inviting residents to view them in-person once the service had been launched.

**RESOLVED that**

- 1) the delivery of a pet cremation service at the Abbey Crematorium be approved.**

**RECOMMENDED that:-**

- 2) A budget of £50,000.00 is added to the Capital Programme for 2026/27 within the Medium-Term Financial Plan for the purchase of the Pet Cremator Machine and all ancillary plant equipment associated with the delivery of this service.**
- 3) the following fees be charged for the Pet Cremation service:**
  - a) small pets £50 - £145;**
  - b) cats £145 - £175; and**
  - c) dogs £175 - £250**

**90. REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE AND DAMP AND MOULD POLICIES**

The Capital Programmes and Contract Manager presented reports on the Repairs and Maintenance and Damp and Mould Policies.

Members were advised that the reports were being presented to the Committee following the release of new Government legislation and guidance. It was confirmed that both policies had been updated to

bring the Council in line with other local authorities and housing associations.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing thanked the officers involved in producing the reports. It was explained that 'Priority Code 4' had been introduced as a repairs category for the replacement of doors and windows as well as works relating to Awaab's Law. The Portfolio Holder praised the hard work of the Repairs and Maintenance team.

There was detailed discussion on the reports, with Members commenting on the following points –

- Members welcomed the renewed interest in the policies which they felt set out a respectful relationship between the Council and tenants based on transparency and communication.
- Performance monitoring and the introduction of new technology was discussed. Members were advised that a review of the Civica Cx system was being carried out. A 'case and task' feature was being added into the system which would forward any outstanding work to the necessary departments, it was noted that a repair could not be signed off until all of the required steps were completed. The Committee was also informed that the Total Mobile system would provide further performance data.
- The implementation of the Total Mobile system. Officers reported that a script was being developed for call handlers to help identify issues and gather the necessary information to ensure repairs were completed correctly on the first visit. In addition, officers informed Members about a diagnostics tool within the system which would allow tenants to take a video of the issue so the Repairs and Maintenance team could diagnose the problem in real time. Officers explained that the Total Mobile system was scheduled to be implemented in May/June 2026. Members were advised that the Capital Programmes and Contract Manager had met with the Customer Engagement Director from Total Mobile the previous week to provide feedback. It was noted that an apology was provided for the delays and Total Mobile confirmed they would be reviewing their progress as regards to implementation.

- The Committee was informed that there had been discussion about appointing/hiring data analysts to better understand and use the data being collated.
- One Member advised that they had been approached by a resident from Keats House who wanted to pass on their compliments to the caretakers.
- It was commented that the language used in the reports was of a technical nature which might not be accessible to all tenants. Members expressed the view that the reports should be transparent and clear for all residents to read and understand. This feedback was noted by officers who agreed with the points raised, although it was commented that certain specific wording might have been required in some cases to ensure the policies complied with legislation. Members asked that officers look at the information published on the Council's website regarding these policies to ensure it was presented in plain English before signposting tenants to the policy itself.
- It was queried whether there was engagement with tenants on the policies and if there was support available for them. Officers advised that support was available for tenants, the information was published on the Council's website and engagement was carried out thereafter. It was noted that the Council was currently going through the process of recruiting an Engagement Officer which would enhance these processes in future.
- The role of the Neighbourhood and Tenancy Officers was queried in relation to conveying the messages of these policies. Officers explained that further tenancy audits were being carried out which would help to identify tenants with specific needs, such as requiring support with reporting repair issues. Further work was also being carried out around the tenant portals. In addition, a Tenancy Support Manager and Tenancy Engagement Officer were also being recruited.

**RECOMMENDED that:-**

- 1) The Repairs and Maintenance Policy which forms part of the Council's Housing Asset Management Strategy, be approved.**

**2) The Damp and Mould Policy, which forms part of the Council's Housing Asset Management Strategy, be approved.**

**91. QUARTER 3 HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE**

The Assistant Director of Environmental and Housing Property Services presented the Quarter Three Housing Improvement Plan (HIP) Update report.

In doing so, he drew Members' attention to the clear, measurable progress that had been made since the regulatory judgement in July 2025.

In relation to outstanding actions, it was highlighted that there were nine 'Green', five 'Amber' and one 'Red' rated actions. It was noted that the one 'Red' action was due to delays with the implementation of the Total Mobile system which had been discussed in the previous minute item.

It was reported that fire safety had been highlighted as an issue through the regulatory judgement. The table contained within the report demonstrated the improvement that had been made since then. Members were assured that officers were looking to make further improvements moving forward and would be setting quarterly targets in order to evidence improvement. In addition, the Committee was advised that officers were seeking to accelerate the fire safety works with funding which had been allocated in the Medium Term Financial Plan.

In relation to transparency, officers were currently progressing with their annual report for 2025/2026. Quarterly performance would be included in the annual report to provide an oversight of progress against the HIP. A new communications strategy was also being implemented to ensure tenants were provided with regular and clear updates.

It was reported that a new Senior Complaints Officer had been recruited and the process was underway to recruit a Tenant Experience Manager and Senior Tenancy Engagement Officer.

The Assistant Director advised that two out of three actions had been completed with regards to 'Neighbourhood and Community'. One 'Amber' issue was outstanding which related to Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) cases. It was explained that the team were progressing with the procurement of new ASB software.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing thanked the Assistant Director and the wider team for producing the report. With regard to the Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2025, it was noted that this had now closed and the response rate had been positive. Moving forward, the Portfolio Holder explained that a plan was being developed for tenant scrutiny and an oversight board. Members were advised that the Council continued to meet regularly with the housing regulator, which provided constructive support in ensuring the Council remained on track and maintained appropriate records.

It was also noted that additional funding had been allocated to address the outstanding and overdue fire safety works, this included the replacement of fire doors.

The Portfolio Holder drew Members' attention to the Council's 'Community and Housing' priorities –

- Build more Council homes.
- Ensure the Council's housing stock was clean and safe to live in.
- Reduce the housing waiting list.
- Reduce the number of families in temporary accommodation.
- Improve time taken for repairs to be completed.

Members were advised that temporary accommodation figures were fluctuating but on the whole were improving. It was explained that the Council was hoping to acquire purpose adapted buildings to support those suffering from homelessness.

The Chair commented that she was pleased to see the figures were moving in the right direction although there was still more to be done to address the overdue repairs. However, clear actions had been identified to demonstrate how this would be achieved moving forward.

In discussing the content of the report, Members commented on the following points –

- At a Strategic Housing Improvement Board meeting there had been discussions about the report and the improvements that had been made. In relation to fire remedial actions, there had been a conversation about the trajectory to achieve targets, and it was recognised that this would take several years. It was queried whether this was on the risk register. In addition, Members asked for future iterations of the report to

contain information regarding how soon they could expect certain actions to be completed in the HIP. The Assistant Director assured Members that fire safety was a priority and at the forefront of discussions with regards to compliance. He advised that a month-by-month plan had been produced which covered the course of the following two financial years. It was noted that it would also be useful to have details of the accelerated proposal in future versions of the report.

- Fire safety mitigations and risk management. The Assistant Director outlined the mitigating actions that were being taken in relation to fire safety. An example was provided regarding robust servicing and maintenance of communal areas. It was explained that the caretaking team ensured that any combustible materials found were disposed of to ensure areas remained as safe as possible. In addition, safety in flat blocks had been invested in to prevent fires being set in ASB prone areas. Members were reassured that under the HIP, a third-party external company had been consulted to ensure measures were robust. A report was scheduled to be released at the start of the following financial year which outlined timescales and any potential supplementary actions which needed to be taken. In addition, surveys were being undertaken to identify whether any intermediary repairs could be carried out, such as re-fitting closures on fire doors that had been removed by tenants. Reassurance was given that all blocks did have fire doors, although these were currently non-compliant with current standards, but they were in situ in the interim while a replacement programme was being carried out.
- It was queried whether the HIP Update and Quarterly Performance reports would be merged at some point in the future. Officers clarified that there wouldn't be a 'conclusion' to the HIP as there would always be new actions and continuous improvements to be made. Therefore, it was confirmed that the reports would remain separate.

**RESOLVED that: -**

- 1) The Housing Improvement Plan Quarter 3 2025/26 Update, which included actions to address areas for improvement, confirmed as part of the Regulator of Social Housing inspection process, be noted.**

## 92. QUARTER 3 HOUSING PERFORMANCE

The Assistant Director of Environmental and Housing Property Services presented the Quarter Three Housing Performance report.

The purpose of the report was to provide an overview of performance for the previous quarter against the twenty-two 'Tenant Satisfaction Measures' as set out by the Regulator for Social Housing. It was noted that ten of the measures were landlord responsibilities.

In presenting the report, the Assistant Director drew Members' attention to the key highlights –

- Improvements with regard to the decreasing levels of non-decency (homes that did not meet the Decent Homes Standard). It was noted that this was based on the calendar year and fluctuations were to be expected.
- Progress that had been made on emergency and non-emergency repairs.
- Building Safety Compliance, which was in a stronger position than Quarter Two.
- Electrical Inspection Condition Reports (EICR). At the end of Quarter Three, 95.66 per cent of properties had had an EICR within the previous five years. The Assistant Director clarified that surveys were undertaken on a five-year rotation although this was dependent on tenants allowing access. Members were assured that increased levels of consultation with Neighbourhood Officers were being carried out to understand why certain residents were refusing access.
- Complaints – it was noted that traditionally there was a spike in complaints during Quarter Three due to deteriorating weather conditions, which often led to rain ingress through roofs and increased mould in properties.
- Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) – increasing levels of ASB were attributed to Cost of Living pressures as well as improved reporting.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing thanked officers for producing the report. He also welcomed the information that had been added into the report regarding support for those whose gas supply had been capped. The Portfolio Holder expressed the view that the Council was heading in the right direction – major investment had been

made in the repairs fleet as well as improved technology and training for staff.

In discussing the content of the report, Members raised the following points –

- Action being taken to address hate crimes. Officers advised that they were identifying trends and worked with the Safer Redditch multi-agency group as well as with individual residents to support with their cases. It was noted that the definition of hate crime had a wide scope. The Chair asked that officers continued to keep a close eye on this to prevent numbers from escalating.
- Members highlighted that more compliments than complaints had been received in this quarter, which they welcomed.
- Members asked for more information to be provided regarding support for those whose gas supply had been capped. Officers advised that they would collate a few case studies to share with the Committee.

**RESOLVED that: -**

**1) The Council's Quarter 3 2025/6 Housing Performance in respect of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (Landlord) be noted.**

**93. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN BUDGET REPORT 2026/2027 TO 2028/29 INCLUDING TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY, CAPITAL STRATEGY AND INVESTMENT STRATEGY)**

The Interim Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer presented the Medium Term Financial Plan Budget Report 2026/27 (including Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy and Investment Strategy).

It was noted that there were typographical errors in the report which referred to the District rather than Borough Council, but this would be corrected when the report was presented at the full Council meeting.

It was highlighted that the Council was in a strong position to set a balanced budget across the three-years of the Medium Term Financial Plan, which represented a significant shift from the position the Council had been in previously. Members were

informed that the report explained the reasons for this and how Members could be assured that the projections could be relied upon.

The Committee was advised that there were three key areas which had been transformational in offsetting pressures.

1. Pension payments. In the previous year it had been assumed that pension payments were going to increase. In contrast, pension payments actually decreased by £216,000.
2. Fairer Funding Review. The Council was not impacted as severely as initial assumptions had suggested.
3. Business Rates appeals. The Government had changed the formula for this and so by adopting the new formula this resulted in an additional £200,000 in the first year and a further £100,000 in the following year.

In relation to the Council's earmarked reserves, Members were asked to note the Reserves Position. It was explained that a review of the reserves had been carried out which looked at what the funding was originally set aside for and whether this applied currently. For example, the business rates reserve had accumulated too much funding under the old formula. Members were advised that once the Council released reserves, the general balance would rise. This would then provide the opportunity for Members to consider what they would like to invest in moving forward and to earmark funding for those areas.

Three main areas had been identified which related to risk (£2.5 million allocated), readiness for Local Government Reorganisation (£1 million) and an earmarked reserve for community projects aligned to the Council's priorities (£1.6 million).

It was noted that earmarked reserves could be used for revenue and capital. Members could choose to allocate the difference from the Community Investment Reserve in order to fund the Capital Programme and £1 million would remain available to be spent elsewhere.

Officers explained that the report outlined assurance and the mitigation of risks, it was an exhaustive Section 25 report which was designed to clearly explain the Council's position.

Members were advised that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was due to repay its first tranche of debt in March 2027. It was explained that the HRA relied on debt and it was important to

consider the whole picture across a thirty-year business plan. The current borrowing profile for the HRA did not currently lend itself to supporting growth at the top.

In relation to Council Tax, Worcestershire County Council was proposing to increase Council Tax by nearly nine per cent. It was highlighted that this would affect Redditch Borough Council's income as residents would likely not be able to pay in advance as they had previously done and in some cases, residents might not be able to cover the cost. This rise was in addition to the change in the default direct debit payment plans from ten months to twelve.

It was also highlighted that significant progress had been made to resolve a long-standing period of underclaimed VAT refunds.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance welcomed the report and the balanced budget position. He explained that risks had been balanced with opportunities when investing in the Borough and contingences had been set aside. Reference was made to the Community Investment Reserve and funding for staffing to implement this, particularly at a time when other local authorities were cutting services. In concluding his comments, the Portfolio Holder emphasised the strong position the Council was in and that an additional £1.6 million was being invested in the community.

Following the presentation of the report, Members had detailed discussions and commented on the following points –

- Regarding the HRA debt profile, it was queried whether this could be spent to further accelerate the fire remediation works or whether it would be best to invest elsewhere. Members were advised that for every pound the HRA paid in interest payments for debt, for example an Interest Coverage Ratio of £1.15 required £1.15 of income for every £1 of interest payment. It was highlighted that the HRA may have additional capacity for borrowing and the General Fund was paying a high price for temporary accommodation. In summary, in order to accelerate the fire remediation programme, it was explained that the HRA needed to first accelerate growth in rental income.
- It was queried whether the Government would be providing funding support in relation to LGR following the decision that elections would be held in May 2026. Officers clarified that some funding had already been granted for LGR, but this was not related to local elections. Members were advised

that the twenty-one areas which were undergoing LGR would be granted some additional funding on top of the funding already allocated. It was currently unclear how much the Council could expect to receive.

- Members made clear that the Council was ambitious and they wanted to invest in projects that benefitted residents and communities going forward.
- It was noted that there could be some opposition to increasing Council Tax. Officers explained that the Fairer Funding Review (FFR) worked on the basis that local authorities would seek to maximise revenue funding opportunities. If the Council chose not to increase Council Tax this would have a compounding effect each year and funding received from the FFR would reflect that.
- Communications regarding the budget. Officers advised that the Communications Team had already drafted a press release which was due to be published shortly, although the budget first needed to be approved by Council.

During consideration of this item, Members noted that the report had been pre-scrutinised at a meeting of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group held that day. The group had proposed the following recommendation for the Executive Committee's consideration:

“That a review of the Council's capital financing requirements including the financing of HRA is undertaken in Quarter 1 2026/27, as stated in the Section 151 Officer's Robustness Statement.”

The Committee considered this recommendation and in doing so noted that they were supportive of the proposed action. This recommendation was therefore endorsed.

The Chair thanked the Interim Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer for her work with the Finance team to produce the report.

**RESOLVED that:**

- 1) The updated position and assumptions be noted in respect of the 2026/27 annual budget and for the Medium-Term Financial Plan up to 2028/29.**
- 2) The comments and implications set out in the Section 151 Officer's Robustness (Section 25) Statement of the 2026/27**

to 2028/29 Medium Term Financial Plan, in its commitment to maintaining the delivery of good quality services and investment to meet local needs within a sustainable financial position, be noted.

- 3) A review of the Council's capital financing requirements including the financing of HRA is undertaken in Q1 2026/27, as stated in the Section 151 Officer's Robustness Statement.

**RECOMMENDED that:**

- 4) The Growth proposals of £187,935 in 2026/27, £192,502 in 2027/28 and £194,182 in 2028/29, be approved.
- 5) The Budget Pressures of £829,378 in 2026/27, £702,745 and £1,038,188 in 2027/28 and 28/29 respectively, be approved.
- 6) The Savings proposals of £29,750 in respectively in each year be approved.
- 7) The Capital Programme 2026/27 to 2029/30, including bids of £1.739m for new capital projects, be approved.
- 8) The council tax increase of 2.99% be approved.
- 9) The revised levels of Earmarked Reserves of £17.294m be carried forward into 2026/27.
- 10) That new earmarked reserves be approved, namely the creation of a new Financial Resilience Reserve of £2.5million, a Local Government Reorganisation Reserve of £1m and a Community Investment Fund of £1.6m.
- 11) Increases relating to Worcestershire Regulatory Services of £30K for Food Standards Agency related work on an ongoing basis are approved.
- 12) The Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy be approved.
- 13) The Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2026/27 – 2029/30 be approved.

#### **94. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2026 were noted.

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

With the exception of the additional recommendation from the Budget Scrutiny Working Group relating to minute item no. 93, there were no minutes or referrals from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or any of the Executive Advisory Panels on this occasion.

**96. TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR 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 for discussion at the meeting.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm  
and closed at 8.01 pm