

Executive Committee

1st February 2011

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Carole Gandy (Chair), Councillor Michael Braley (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Juliet Brunner, Greg Chance, Brandon Clayton, Malcolm Hall, Gay Hopkins, Jinny Pearce and Debbie Taylor

Also Present:

Councillors Kath Banks, Roger Hill and Derek Taylor

Officers:

I Gregory, H Halls, S Hanley, C John, T Kristunas, G Revans, J Staniland, L Tompkin and E Cartwright

Committee Services Officer:

I Westmore

164. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

165. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

166. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair advised the Committee that the following items of business, scheduled on the Forward Plan to be dealt with at this evening's meeting, had been rescheduled to a later meeting of the Committee:

- Initial Estimates 2011/12 and Forecasts for 2012/13 and 2013/14; and
- Fees and Charges 2011/12.

The Chair advised that she had accepted the following matters as Urgent Business:

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Chair

- Item 6 – Independent Remuneration Panel for Worcestershire District Councils – Annual Report and Recommendations for 2011/12;
- Polling Stations – Annual Review 2011; and
- Budget Update.

Finally the Chair advised that she had accepted late circulation of the following papers:

Item 4 – Minutes of the Executive Committee held on 12th January 2011.

167. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meetings of the Executive Committee held on 2nd December 2010, 10th January and 12th January 2011 be confirmed as correct records and signed by the Chair.

168. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2011/12

Members considered a report setting out the initial estimates for the Housing Revenue Account and the proposed dwelling rents for the coming year.

With respect to the dwelling rent the Committee was informed that the data included in the Housing Revenue Account Subsidy Determination for 2011/12 had resulted in a proposed actual average rent increase for 2011/12 of 5.99%.

Officers explained that it was anticipated that 2011/12 would be the final year of housing subsidy. It was expected that the Council would be in a negative subsidy position to the extent of around £6,000,000 in the coming year. However, it was expected that transitional arrangements would result in the Council not retaining the negative subsidy money for the first few years following the ending of subsidy.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the draft 2011/12 Estimates for the Housing Revenue Account attached to the report at Appendix A, be approved;**
- 2) the actual average rent increase for 2011/12 be 5.99%; and**

- 3) **£1,000,000 be transferred to a reserve as a Revenue Contribution to Capital to fund the future Capital Programme.**

169. INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WORCESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCILS - ANNUAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2011-12

The Committee considered the first report and recommendations that had been prepared by the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) for the Worcestershire Districts.

The IRP had recommended that the allowances available to members of the authority in 2011/12 should remain unchanged from the current levels of allowances. The only really significant change proposed was the removal of the allowance paid to Vice-Chairs.

Officers notified the Committee that several minor inaccuracies had been identified within one section of the report and tabled an amended version of the Allowance Recommendations 2011/12.

It was noted that the Group Leaders had not had the opportunity to discuss payment to Vice-Chairs and it was therefore agreed that any recommendation to Council should, at this stage, be in principle. To allow these discussions to take place it was further proposed that the recommendations be considered at the meeting of the Council on 21st February 2011.

RECOMMENDED that, in principle

- 1) **the Basic Allowances for 2011/2012 remain unchanged from those recommended for 2010/11 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;**
- 2) **the Special Responsibility Allowances for 2011/2012 remain unchanged from those recommended for 2010/11 in terms of sums paid, but that allowances be not paid to Vice-Chairs of Committees;**
- 3) **travel and subsistence allowances for 2011/12 continue to be paid in accordance with the HMRC (Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs Office) mileage allowance;**
- 4) **the Dependent Carer's Allowance remains unchanged; and**

RESOLVED that

- 5) these recommendations be considered at the 21st February budget-setting meeting of the Council.**

(This report had been accepted as a matter of Urgent Business – not on the Forward Plan – and was considered at the meeting as such, with the approval of the Chair, in accordance with the Council's constitutional rules and the powers vested in the Chair by virtue of Section 100 (B) (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972 to agree to matters of urgency being discussed by reason of special circumstances.

In this case the special circumstances were that Members' allowances needed to be approved in advance of the agreement of the budget for 2011/12 and the setting of the Council Tax.)

170. SHARED INFORMATION AND RECORD MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Committee received a report setting out a Strategy for implementing Information and Records Management initiatives at both Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils.

Members were content that the Strategy was comprehensive. The only fundamental concern that was expressed was around the lack of any mention of data quality among the core principles within the Strategy. Officers pinpointed those parts of the Strategy that dealt with data quality for the benefit of Members but fully accepted that data quality was a key issue that should be given prominence within the Strategy. The use of some ICT- and business-related jargon within the Strategy was also noted and the hope expressed that this would not filter through to the Council's communications with its customers and service users.

RECOMMENDED that

the Information and Records Management Strategy attached at Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

171. CREMATORIUM ENERGY RECOVERY PROJECT

The Committee considered a report that outlined a proposal to re-use the waste heat generated by the removal of heat from the crematorium flue gases as part of the process of mercury abatement to offset the gas requirements at the adjoining Abbey Stadium development.

It was recognised at the outset that this was a sensitive topic and that the Council needed to be aware of the potential misgivings of some persons over the nature of the proposed development. It was hoped that the information contained within the report and which had been provided over recent days in response to widespread media coverage had served to allay any concerns as to the proposal.

Members and Officers both reported that they had received overwhelmingly supportive feedback in respect of the project. Members were unanimous in their support for the recommended course of action and expressed the view that the Council was leading the way nationally with this proposal and that, in time, other local authorities would be compelled to consider similar measures to some degree. The Committee was grateful to the Head of Environmental Services, the Climate Change Manager and the Bereavement Services Manager and his staff for their efforts in developing the project and the sensitive manner in which they had dealt with the subsequent interest in the proposal.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) £40,000, a proportion of the capital sum already approved for the installation of mercury abatement and cremation equipment, be redirected to the Abbey Stadium development project, to fund the engineering process associated with recommendation 2; and**

subject to which, RESOLVED that

- 2) any waste heat recovered as part of the flue gas cleaning process at the crematorium be used to supplement the heating requirement of the Abbey Stadium development; and**
- 3) expenditure of up to the sum agreed by the Council at 1) above be approved in accordance with Standing Order 41, for the purposes defined in the report.**

172. PRIVATE SECTOR HOME SUPPORT SERVICE

The Committee was asked to consider the introduction of the Council's Home Support Service into the private sector.

Officers explained that, at the present time, the Home Support Service was only available to the Council's tenants. It was further explained that continued receipt of Supporting People funding might be dependant on the Council demonstrating that the service was

available to both Council and private tenants as an unwillingness to extend in this way could be construed as a breach of contract.

Members sought assurances that existing service users would not be adversely affected by the proposal and that it would not place additional financial burdens on the Council. The Committee was informed that the overall amount of service provision was not due to change, this remaining at 840 hours, and that reviews of service users' needs would be undertaken to establish each individuals' requirements. The focus would be on providing the service to those eligible people who demonstrated the greatest need regardless of their tenure and continuing to ensure that the best outcomes were achieved from the available resources. The County Council were to fund a post to promote and develop the work of the Supporting People funded service.

There was some discussion as to the current requirement to support the service through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the extent to which this could continue should the service move towards an increasingly private sector client base. Officers undertook to provide Councillor Chance with further information on the amount of HRA funding currently involved following the meeting.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **the Home Support Service be introduced to the Private Sector; and**
- 2) **an emergency Home Support call out service be introduced to private sector customers.**

173. POLLING STATIONS - ANNUAL REVIEW 2011

The Committee considered the outcomes of an interim review of Polling Places within the Borough of Redditch. The review had resulted in three proposals to move to alternative polling locations, these being in Abbey, Church Hill and Headless Cross and Oakenshaw Wards.

Officers explained the rationale for seeking alternative venues in these cases and the constraints upon them in identifying suitable premises. Although it was sometimes regrettable to move from an established location, certain circumstances made this unavoidable or very desirable.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **the polling places detailed at Appendix 1 to the report be approved and adopted, with particular reference to proposed changes in respect of Abbeywood First School**

in Church Hill and the REDI Centre, which are to take immediate effect; and

- 2) with regard to the Methodist Church Schoolroom, Headless Cross, the change take effect only when necessary, once the date of closure of the current premises is known.**

(This report had been accepted as a matter of Urgent Business – not on the Forward Plan – and was considered at the meeting as such, with the approval of the Chair, in accordance with the Council's constitutional rules and the powers vested in the Chair by virtue of Section 100 (B) (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972 to agree to matters of urgency being discussed by reason of special circumstances.)

In this case the special circumstances were that the identification and agreement of Polling Places was required in good time before the elections in May 2011.)

174. CORPORATE SICKNESS STATISTICS

Officers provided the Committee with an overview of the Council's performance in managing sickness absence for the first quarter of 2010/11. Members were concerned at the amount of stress-related absence that was demonstrated in the data. The Committee was keen to establish whether the organisation had high levels of absence through stress in comparison to similar organisations, if it did experience high levels why this was the case and the scope of the problems covered by the generic term. In large part this was through a realisation that there were many areas of sickness absence over which the authority had limited influence whereas it was possible there were avenues the Council could explore to manage stress-related absence more effectively. It was suggested that back-strain and other non-specific conditions could be more closely investigated in this manner. It was also suggested that exception reporting and profiling be considered as means of achieving a better understanding of sickness absence data.

It was noted that the Human Resources function would shortly be moving towards a shared service arrangement and the reintroduction of an in house Occupational Health provision was to be explored as part of this process.

More generally, Members were updated on the means by which sickness absence was currently managed including the routine provision of return to work interviews and the measures that were available to reintroduce people to work following prolonged absence.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the statistics be noted;**
- 2) **the programme outlined in paragraphs 4.13 to 4.16 of the report to reduce sickness absence be approved; and**
- 3) **future quarterly reports reflect Members' comments as outlined in the preamble above.**

175. SHARED SERVICES BOARD

Members received the notes and recommendations of the Shared Services Board from its meeting held on 11th January 2011.

Recommendations included proposals relating to the establishment of a shared North Worcestershire Economic Development Team.

Members also considered an update on the WETT (Worcestershire Enhanced two-tier Property Services arrangements).

(During consideration of this item, Members considered exempt matters detailed in the confidential notes of the meeting. Given that there was no discussion of the exempt matters under consideration, exclusion of the public and press was not necessary. However, to maintain its confidentiality the record of the Committee's decisions is recorded as a separate exempt minute below.)

176. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Officers explained that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had not been available in time for this meeting and would be presented to the next ordinary meeting of the Executive Committee. There had been no recommendations for the Executive Committee to consider arising from the meeting in question.

177. MINUTES / REFERRALS - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, EXECUTIVE PANELS, NEIGHBOURHOOD GROUPS ETC.

There were no minutes or referrals under this item.

178. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

179. ACTION MONITORING

Officers reported that the final two actions listed under the meeting on 12th January 2011 had now been completed.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

180. BUDGET UPDATE

With the agreement of the Chair, Officers provided a brief oral update on the budget preparation position going forward.

Officers reported that, as expected the appeal over the loss of money for the Dial-a-Ride service had been successful, at least to an extent. Money had been reallocated to the Council for 2011/12 but not to the same level as had existed and the figure for the 2012/13 financial year showed a further fall in allocation.

A number of increased income levels and savings for 2011/12 were reported as were several further financial pressures with the result that the overall shortfall for the 2011/12 year was expected to be £737,000. The funding gaps for 2012/13 and 2013/14 were estimated at £1.5M and £1M respectively. The remaining funding gap for the current year would primarily be addressed through balances.

It was noted that officers were to be instructed to further consider the following revenue bids prior to approval of the budget for the coming year with a view to potentially changing their priority, the reasoning being that they were investing to save proposals:

(All PLANNING revenue bids)
Town Centre Regeneration - Grants evening economy
Aftercare service
Business Start Up Grant
Careers Fair for Year 8 Students
Graduate Programme

It was also noted that Officers were to explore the possibility of a loan of £180,000 for the provision of solar panels, rather than the £48,000 previously identified.

(This oral report had been accepted as a matter of Urgent Business and was considered at the meeting as such, with the approval of the Chair, in accordance with the Council's constitutional rules and the powers vested in the Chair by virtue of Section 100 (B) (4) (b) of

the Local Government Act 1972 to agree to matters of urgency being discussed by reason of special circumstances.

In this case the special circumstances were that the information on the final allocations of money from central Government in respect of concessionary fares had only just been received and had an impact on the overall budget preparation process.)

The Meeting commenced at 7.00pm
and closed at 9.14pm

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Chair