

Executive Committee

12th February 2013

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Bill Hartnett (Chair), Councillor Greg Chance (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Rebecca Blake, Michael Braley, Carole Gandy, Phil Mould, Mark Shurmer and Debbie Taylor

Officers:

E Baker, R Bamford, C Flanagan, J Godwin, S Jones, T Kristunas, S Morgan, J Pickering and M Bough

Committee Services Officer:

I Westmore

140. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Luke Stephens.

141. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Hartnett declared an interest in Item 10 (Disposal of Hewell Road Swimming Baths and Adjacent Play Area for Affordable Housing) as detailed separately at Minute 149 below.

142. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements from the Leader.

143. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 15th January 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

144. REDDITCH GROWTH CONSULTATION

Officers introduced a report that was seeking approval for consultation to be carried out between 25th February and 8th April 2013 on proposed Redditch Growth. The consultation was to be carried out jointly with Bromsgrove District Council as the potential housing growth was to be contained within Bromsgrove District.

The meeting was informed that the proposed growth was to meet the need which had been identified in a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). This work suggested that the housing requirement for Redditch to 2030 was 6,380 dwellings. A second assessment, a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) had demonstrated that there was the capacity to accommodate around 3,000 dwellings within Redditch Borough, leaving a balance of around 3,400 dwellings to be accommodated cross boundary. Local authorities were required to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply, based on their housing requirement, and Redditch was unable to fulfil this requirement within its own boundaries.

Twenty potential sites around the borders of the Borough of Redditch were initially assessed and, of these, five were progressed to focussed site appraisal. The outcome of this second stage was the identification of sites at Foxlydiate and Brockhill East as the most suitable options for housing growth.

Some Members did not accept the need for an additional 6,000 houses. A site visit undertaken the previous Saturday had provided an insight into the impact of the proposed growth. It was suggested that there should be an opportunity for Members and other consultees, including residents, to consider further areas of land. It was noted that, during the consultation on Local Plan No. 3 the public had been presented with choices and the thought was expressed that consultation was not particularly meaningful in the absence of choice. It was further suggested that there were additional pieces of land which were not being considered for development because of the potential impact upon Bromsgrove District. Officers were asked how many houses had built since the Regional Spatial Strategy had been released in 2009 and whether these could be offset against the current housing need.

Officers explained that not having sufficient land available to meet the current housing need left the Borough vulnerable to losing at appeal over applications for development, all other things being equal. An undertaking was made to provide Members of the Committee with the numbers of the houses built each year within the Borough since 2009.

The contention that increased housing alongside existing housing developments made an improvement in public transport more likely was questioned. It was suggested that the proposed growth would impact significantly on Webheath and Headless Cross whilst failing to meet the current shortfall in housing need. In answer to specific questions, Officers clarified that there were currently around 3,000 people on the Council's Housing Waiting List and, of those, around 900 were in housing need.

Members of the Committee noted that there were a lot of outstanding questions about the sites being proposed for future growth and it was hoped that the forthcoming consultation period would begin to provide answers to some of those questions and gather the views of local residents on the proposals. It was made clear that the initial selection of possible areas for development had been undertaken by Officers and that Members' role in the process was now starting with the agreement of documentation to be put out for public consultation. Officers added that the proposed housing growth was in line with the annual pattern of housing growth within the Borough since the mid-1980s.

RECOMMENDED that

the consultation document, Redditch Growth Consultation (Appendix 1) and the supporting background evidence report (Appendix 2) and the accompanying Sustainability Appraisal (Appendix 3) be approved for public consultation jointly between 25th February and 8th April 2013.

145. DRAFT BOROUGH OF REDDITCH LOCAL PLAN NO.4

The Committee considered a report which was proposing the approval of a draft Local Plan No.4 for the purpose of public consultation. The Local Plan was required to establish the proposed levels of growth for the Borough, most particularly in relation to numbers of new dwellings and the amount of new land for employment purposes up until 2030. Members commented that the constituent parts of the Local Plan had received previous consideration at meetings of the Planning Advisory Panel and it was noted that the Infrastructure Delivery Plan had been received by the Panel earlier that same evening.

There were concerns expressed at the impact of further development at Webheath, particularly in relation to traffic congestion in Headless Cross centre. It was reported that traffic problems were currently a feature of that junction and that the problems would be compounded by further development in that vicinity. Officers explained that highways modelling had not been undertaken by the County Council at that location as the pinch-point

on that route had been identified some way from the junction. It was stated that, should Members want modelling carried out on that junction, the Council could ask the County Council to do that, but the Council would have to meet the cost. Officers added that detailed modelling had been carried out in connection with an ongoing planning application and Officers offered to check which junctions were concerned and report back to all Members.

It was suggested that the creation of a further 3,000 homes under this Local Plan would leave no further housing land in Redditch and Officers were asked what the options were at that point. It was noted that, as ever, the Council would be required to comply with nationally imposed requirements but, should a no further growth option be available, the Council could consider that at the time.

Officers accepted that the two most contentious issues in the Local Plan No. 4 were the Webheath ADR land and the Brockhill area and explained that they had given those most closely involved with campaigns to limit development in these areas prior notice that these matters would be coming before the Council as a consequence.

RECOMMENDED that

the Draft Borough of Redditch Local Plan No. 4 (Appendix 1) and the accompanying Sustainability Appraisal (Appendix 2) are approved for public consultation between 25th February 2013 and 8th April 2013.

146. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2013/14 - 2015/16

The Committee received an update on the budget position in advance of the Council Tax Setting meeting the following week. It was reported that Heads of Service and Finance Officers had been working hard to achieve savings over recent months but could now come forward with a balanced budget, although, as ever, there were some risks involved. The Leader thanked the Finance Team for their efforts in achieving this outcome in difficult circumstances.

Officers highlighted a typographical error in paragraph 3.6 wherein it had incorrectly been stated that the cumulative grant reduction for 2014/15 was £2,289,000 (41%) rather than the £2,389,000 (43%) intended.

The proposed savings through transformation of £150,000 were based upon previous savings through this means but were difficult to allocate any more precisely. The expected VAT refunds were also not able to be finally quantified as yet. At the end of the year it was anticipated that the Council would hold just over £900,000 in

balances. What was clear was that the following two years would present further challenges to the authority.

It was accepted by Members that it was a further difficult year for the Council, not helped by the late announcement of the Grant Settlement, and the meeting was informed that the outcome of a letter of appeal to the Government over the Settlement had been a further small reduction in the Council's grant.

There was some discussion over the financial implications of the Local Plan No. 4 and the Cross Boundary Growth Consultation and whether money had previously been re-allocated for other purposes. Officers confirmed that the necessary funding was in place and undertook to provide further clarification on this matter prior to the forthcoming meeting of the Council.

RESOLVED that

the current position for 2013/14 – 2015/16 be noted and Officers be requested that Officers review the savings that can be delivered to achieve a balanced budget.

147. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - 2013-14 - RENT SETTING

Officers explained that 2013 was the first year out of the Housing Subsidy system. Because of the proportion of the national housing debt inherited by the Council, the Council was no longer in a position to borrow to fund the future capital programme.

A further major change was the requirement to calculate depreciation on the Council's housing stock, although there was a five-year transitional period before a final depreciation figure was required.

A Member noted that the total figure for Landlords, Costs, Insurance etc. seemed to be extremely modest and Officers were asked how much insurance was being paid per property as a proportion of this figure. Officers undertook to provide this information to Members of the Committee.

Members were keen that the Council continued to maintain a good quality housing stock.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the draft 2013/14 Estimates for the Housing Revenue Account attached to the report at Appendix A, be approved;**

- 2) the actual average rent increase for 2013/14 be 3.8% (2.6% RPI plus 1.2% due to rent restructuring); and
- 3) £3.5m be transferred to a reserve as a Revenue Contribution to Capital to fund the future Capital Programme and repay borrowing.

148. FEES AND CHARGES 2013/14

The Committee received the proposed Fees and Charges for the Council's chargeable services for the coming year. It was explained that Heads of Service had aimed to achieve a three percent increase in income over their range of services.

A Member questioned the cost of the hire of the Abbey Stadium Swimming Pool for local first schools, noting that they were aware of at least one school which used a pool further afield. This was set against the backdrop of the provision of free swimming for under 16s and over 60s. Officers undertook to investigate this matter, adding that there could be a range of factors other than costs which had led the school to this course of action. It was added that the free swimming had seen a very considerable uptake in the year to date with around 6,000 individuals taking advantage thus far.

A further question was asked about hire products on page 53 and the apparently high cost of having an alarm. Again, Officers undertook to establish the reasons for the present charging level and report this back to Members.

The Committee noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had reviewed the Fees and Charges the previous week and were content to endorse the comments made by that body.

RECOMMENDED that

the fees and charges for 2013/14 as set out in Appendix A - H to the report be approved; other than in cases where:-

- a) fees or charges are statutory,
- b) fees and charges are set externally, or
- c) other Council- approved circumstances apply; and

RESOLVED that

the comments of the Overview of the Scrutiny Committee be noted.

149. DISPOSAL OF HEWELL ROAD SWIMMING BATHS AND ADJACENT PLAY AREA FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Members considered a report which proposed the disposal of the Hewell Road Pool site to a Registered Provider for the development of affordable housing.

There was some discussion around the criteria used for the assessing of the Registered Providers' bids and whether any one Group might be advantaged or disadvantaged by the proposed scoring system. Officers were of the opinion that all the potential providers would be in a position to apply on equal terms for the right to develop.

The value of the site was also a matter raised by a Member. The suggestion that the site be handed to a Registered Provider for as little as £1 was queried in light of the Council's obligation to dispose of land for the best consideration. Officers confirmed that disposals at less than best consideration were permissible under certain circumstances and explained that the disposal in this case would also involve the clearance of the site by the developer and insurance against restrictive covenants and similar risks.

There was widespread agreement that the proposed affordable housing on the site was to be welcomed

RESOLVED that

- 1) the option to dispose of the Hewell Road swimming baths site and the adjacent play area (plan at appendix 1) by sale or transfer for the development of affordable housing to a Registered Provider from the Council's Preferred Partner list be pursued;**
- 2) the selection criteria (appendix 2) be agreed;**
- 3) Officers invite development submissions for the site from the Council's Preferred Partner Registered Providers;**
- 4) a selection panel be formed of Members, and supported by Officers to assess and evaluate the submissions and nominate the proposed partner; and**
- 5) the selection panel brings a further report to the Executive Committee for the formal selection of the successful submission.**

(During consideration of this item, Councillor Bill Hartnett declared an other disclosable interest as a Member of the Board of Redditch Co-operative Homes, appointed by the Council, and vacated the Chair and the Chamber for the duration of this item. The Vice-Chair, Councillor Chance, assumed the Chair in Councillor Hartnett's absence.)

150. NOMINATION OF AN ASSET OF COMMUNITY VALUE

Officers introduced a report detailing a request that the Redditch Youth House be listed as an Asset of Community Value.

The Youth House was currently vacant and a local group had put together a bid to bring the building back into use. The approval of the request would provide a 6 month period to generate sufficient funds to purchase the building to provide community facilities.

Members welcomed this proposal and wished the group well in their venture.

RESOLVED that

the listing of the Redditch Youth House as an Asset of Community Value be approved.

151. QUARTERLY MONITORING - WRITE OFF OF DEBTS - QUARTER 3 - OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2012

Members considered the latest quarterly report of the action taken by Officers with respect to the write-off of debts during the previous quarter.

RESOLVED that

the content of the report be noted.

152. REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL - RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES FOR 2013-14

Members considered the annual report from the Independent Remuneration Panel for Worcestershire District Councils (IRP) setting out that body's recommendations for the level of allowances to be paid to members of the Council for the coming Municipal Year. The IRP had met with all Leaders of the Worcestershire Districts in preparation for this report.

Members reiterated the view expressed in previous years that this decision be taken out of their hands and levels of allowances be set nationally.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the Council has regard to the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel;
- 2) the Council does not accept the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel, set out in detail in Appendix 1 to its report, for the following allowances:

**Basic
Leader
Deputy Leader
Portfolio Holders
Executive Members without Portfolio
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Task Groups
Chair of Audit and Governance Committee
Chair of Planning Committee
Chair of Licensing Committee
Chair of Standards Committee
Political Group Leaders;**

- 3) the Council accepts the Panel's recommendations for travel, subsistence and dependent carers allowances;
- 4) for 2013-14, the Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances continue at the level set for 2012-13, as set out in detail in the final column in appendix 1 to the Panel's report;
- 5) the Panel's recommendation relating to the Parish Council be noted.

153. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Members received the minutes of a recent meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 8th January 2013 be received and noted.

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

There were no minutes or referrals to consider under this item.

155. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

The Committee received the most recent report on the activity of the Council's Advisory panels and similar bodies.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

156. ACTION MONITORING

The Committee received the latest Action Monitoring report.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.27 pm

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Chair