

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 14 January 2014

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Bill Hartnett (Chair), Councillor Greg Chance (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Juliet Brunner, Brandon Clayton, John Fisher, Phil Mould, Mark Shurmer and Debbie Taylor

Also Present:

Councillors Andy Fry, Pattie Hill and Yvonne Smith

Officers:

S Hanley, J. Pickering, D Poole, A De Warr, J Willis, L Tompkin, C Flanagan, M Hanwell and S Mould

Committee Services Officer:

R Cole

107. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Rebecca Blake.

108. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

109. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements from the Leader.

110. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 10th December 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

111. REDI CENTRE - MEANWHILE LEASE

The Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) referred to previous decisions taken in respect of 54 South Street, the former REDI Centre. In September 2013 a decision had been taken to market the building for disposal.

Subsequently the property had been registered as an Asset of Community Value and Members had requested that officers explore opportunities for the use of the building in the meantime during the six month "moratorium" period arising as a result of the nomination.

Officers had therefore sought expressions of interest for use of the building for the intervening period from Community Groups. The only application received was from Redditch Youth and Community Enterprise (RYCE) which was a Charitable Community Benefit Society. It was reported that RYCE would intend to offer the facilities to community groups, would meet all utility costs and was able to take a lease with immediate effect.

Members all welcomed the proposed use of the building by RYCE who would be working with other organisations within the Borough as a positive opportunity to make good use of the building for the 6 month period available. In addition the cost of maintaining an empty building would be removed.

In response to Members' queries it was reported that RYCE were fully aware of the position that the building would only be available to them for a limited period and that it would remain for sale at the price quoted.

RESOLVED that

authority be delegated to the Executive Director (Finance and Resources) and the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services to develop a Meanwhile Lease for RYCE to occupy and operate the REDI Centre for a period of up to six months.

112. COUNCIL TAX BASE AND NON-DOMESTIC RATES (NDR) BASE 2014/15

The Committee considered a report that would enable it to recommend the level for the Council Tax Base for 2014/15. The Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) reminded Members that this was a technical calculation which officers had undertaken and also made reference to the need to agree arrangements in respect of the Non Domestic Rates base.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **the calculation of the Council's Tax Base for the whole and parts of the area for 2014/15, as detailed in Appendix A to the report be approved;**
- 2) **in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992, the figures calculated by the Redditch Borough Council as its tax base for the whole area for the year 2014/15 be 24,656.96 and for the parts of the area listed below be:**

Parish of Feckenham	364.78
Rest of Redditch	<u>24, 292.18</u>
	<u>24,656.96</u>
- 3) **authority be delegated to the Section 151 Officer (Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources) to approve the NDR1 and sign it on behalf of the Council.**

113. LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2014/15

Members received a report summarising the results of the statutory consultation which had been undertaken on the Redditch Borough Council's draft Council Tax Support Scheme 2014 (the Scheme).

Members were aware that the Scheme had to be reviewed by the Council on an Annual basis and that the decision had previously been taken to consult on the basis that entitlement to Council Tax support should be capped at 80% of Council Tax liability so that all working age claimants would pay a minimum of 20% towards their Council Tax Liability.

Members were reminded that the cost to the Borough of the changes introduced by the Government from April 2013 which had resulted in the national Council Tax Benefit being replaced by a locally agreed scheme was approximately £91,000. Other precepting Authorities including the County Council and the Fire and Police Authorities would also have to bear their share of the shortfall. A proportion of the shortfall had been clawed back through changes to discounts and exemptions for second and empty homes.

It was reported that the consultation which had closed on 20th December 2013, had resulted in the receipt of 46 responses. Of these 37% were in favour of the changes to the scheme and 6.5% offered no opinion. 56.5% did not support the proposed change.

The report also contained details of the proposed implementation of a Hardship Fund to assist those most badly affected by the change. The report highlighted that the Hardship Scheme was proposed to be as flexible as possible within certain parameters to ensure that the fund could be used to help those most in need.

Members were very concerned about the impact the changes would have upon residents albeit there was an intention to mitigate this with the introduction of a Hardship Fund. Members were also mindful however of the need to address the potential funding gap both for the Council and other preceptors.

It was queried whether an alternative proposal could be considered. Officers confirmed that only changes which had been the subject of public consultation could be brought into effect at this stage. The scheme was required to be agreed by 31st January 2014.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the Scheme, as amended, be implemented, namely that entitlement to Council Tax support should be capped at 80% of Council Tax liability so that all working age claimants will pay a minimum of 20% towards their Council Tax liability; and**
- 2) the implementation of the proposed Hardship scheme be agreed.**

114. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) gave a presentation which provided Members with an update on the position regarding the Medium Term Financial Plan 2014/15 to 2016/17. The presentation highlighted the Authority's Strategic Purposes and the expenditure associated with each of the purposes together with the costs of enabling.

The projected shortfall in funding for 2014/15 had been reduced from £1,631,000 to £352,000 by way of the use of reserves both general and capital replacement, through the reduction in enabling costs and through further service reviews. The remaining shortfall was being addressed by Heads of Service and Managers identifying further savings through the redesign of services, with the proviso that front line services would not be adversely affected. In addition income generation was being reviewed wherever possible.

It was reported that the shortfall in funding was due largely to the drastic reduction in funding from central Government rather than from an increase in spending.

Issues which were highlighted within the presentation included the assumption of a staff pay award of 1%, the cost of borrowing for example for fleet replacement, potential capital receipts in the future and the impact of cuts in Worcestershire County Council funding, including the likely increase in demand for services provided by this Authority.

Members were very concerned regarding the current position particularly in view of the efforts made by officers and Members of the Authority to significantly increase efficiency through shared services and transformation and to reduce spending where possible.

Reference was made by Members to the poor level of financial support received by the Borough from central Government in comparison to other Authorities in Worcestershire. This had previously been the subject of a complaint to the Department of Communities and Local Government and it was felt a further letter should be sent by the Leader in response to this year's settlement.

There was also a request from a Member for information regarding the level of grant settlement to Authorities within the County over the past 10 years.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the presentation of the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) on the Medium Term Financial Plan be noted : and**

RECOMMENDED that

- 2) **the Leader writes in the strongest terms to the Department of Communities and Local Government in response to the grant settlement as the Borough Council has again received the worst settlement in Worcestershire.**

115. POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES - 2013/14 REVIEW

Members considered a report on the findings of the formal review of Polling Districts and Polling Places as required under legislation.

The report contained officer recommendations arising from the review and if these were approved by the Council on 27th January

2014 they would have effect from the date of the publication of the revised Register of Electors on 14th February 2014.

Members welcomed the report and acknowledged the work which had been undertaken by officers in carrying out the review.

In relation to Church Hill North Polling District (CHB), Members noted the request received from the Abbeywood First School but queried whether this was an appropriate change. Members were mindful of the potential road safety, traffic and parking issues in relation to the suggested alternative premises of St Andrew's Church.

RECOMMENDED that:

- 1)
 - a) **the Polling District changes indicated on the plan displayed at the meeting made to Brockhill Polling District (BYB) in the Batchley and Brockhill Ward, to generate a new Polling District (BYD), with effect from the date of publication of the next revised Register of Electors (14 February 2014);**
 - b) **that Council be requested to determine whether the new Polling District (BYD) be named 'Lowans', OR 'Brockhill East';**
 - c) **that Council be requested to determine that in the case of 'Brockhill East' being selected at b) above, the current 'Brockhill' Polling District (BYB) be redesignated 'Brockhill West';**
- 2) **the Council designate the entire new Polling District 'BYD' as the Polling Place for the Polling District, until such time as planned new community facilities/school are built and available for this purpose and that, thereafter, they be the designated Polling Place;**
- 3) **further to 2) above, in the interim, authority be delegated to the (Acting) Returning Officer, in consultation with Leaders, Portfolio Holder and Ward Members, to confirm the precise location of the new portable unit(s) to provide Polling Places within the new 'BYD' Polling District;**
- 4) **In respect of Appendix 1 to the report ('Review Final Recommendations',)**
 - a) **there be no change to existing arrangements, where indicated;**

b) there be no change to existing arrangements in respect of Church Hill North Polling District (CHB) Church Hill Ward;

c) the relocation of the Polling Station for St Peters Polling District (CCA) Crabbs Cross Ward be approved;

d) the relocation of the Polling Station Highfields Polling District (HOB) Headless Cross and Oakenshaw Ward be approved but that the Council be requested to consider the renaming of the Polling District ; and

e) the decisions under b) c) and d) above take effect from 14th February 2014;

5) a proposed new voluntary contract in respect of the use of private premises as Polling Places, as illustrated at Appendix 3 to the report, be endorsed and implemented with immediate effect.

116. IMPACT OF WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL BUDGET PROPOSALS

Members were reminded that the purpose of including this item on the agenda was to enable a discussion to take place on the impact of the proposed Worcestershire County Council budget cuts. This would enable a consultation response from the Borough Council to be compiled.

The Committee considered the schedules of information provided by officers. At this stage it was stressed that some of the impact upon Borough residents was unclear as full details of funding proposals were not available from the County Council.

Clearly the Committee were extremely concerned at the potential impact of the budget cuts planned by the County Council. Two areas of particular concern were Community Services and Housing.

It was noted that the proposed reduction in funding for Assistive Technology would impact on the Council's Lifeline Service as the budget contributed significantly to the service through the Supporting People Grant. This would result in a loss of £202,000 to RBC. At present 1,129 of current users were assisted through the Supporting People funding. There was likely to be an increased demand for this service in future as the proportion of elderly people within the population grows.

Members felt that there would be a need to consult with users of the Lifeline Service on an individual basis to determine the future of the

service should there be such a reduction in County Council funding. The consultation would need to include options in respect of levels of service and the likely costs. Officers acknowledged this possibility and undertook to bring back to the Executive further details around costs and likely impact of changes on the service.

There was discussion in relation to the impact on Housing Services in particular St David's House which would result from the reduction in Supporting People Grant and Social Care funding. Officers confirmed that discussion was on going with the County Council to understand the exact implications and to identify how the service could continue to be delivered.

Housing support for young people and other vulnerable groups was another area of concern as Members were aware that cuts to services in this area would be likely to have a significant impact of the demand for other services provided by the Borough Council and other public bodies.

Members emphasised that across the whole range of services it had been demonstrated that early and effective intervention could prevent much more severe and indeed costly problems at a later stage. Intervention at the right time was the key. Whilst the funding position of the County Council was acknowledged, the cuts proposed by that Authority were short sighted in that they would only increase the likelihood of further difficulties and an increase in demand for future services.

It was felt that whilst this Council had attempted to increase efficiency and cut costs through a systems thinking approach and a concentration on the needs of the residents, the County was adopting a much less structured approach of severe cuts which would impact on the most vulnerable.

Following the detailed debate it was

RESOLVED

- 1) that officers be instructed to respond to Worcestershire County Council within the respective consultation period(s) on the impact of the proposed cuts on behalf of the Executive Committee; and**
- 2) that the final response be endorsed by the Leader and Chief Executive Officer.**

117. WORCESTERSHIRE SHARED SERVICES - REMOVAL OF HEALTH AND WELLBEING FROM FUNCTIONAL ACTIVITY OF THE SERVICE

The Committee considered a report which sought agreement to modify the statement of partner service requirements for Worcestershire Regulatory Services by removing the requirements in relation to health and wellbeing and health promotion. It was reported that work in relation to health and wellbeing and health promotion was now largely undertaken by other bodies.

It was noted that the proposed change would result in savings to the Borough Council of £22,000 per annum and would avoid duplication of the function.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the statement of partner service requirements for Worcestershire Regulatory Services be modified by removing the requirements in relation to health and wellbeing and health promotion; and**
- 2) delegated authority be given to the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services, following consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holders, to make the relevant amendments to the legal agreement with the other partners.**

118. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 3rd December 2013.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 3rd December 2013 be received and noted.

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

There were no minutes or referrals under this item.

120. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

The regular update on the activity of the Council's Advisory Panels and similar bodies was considered by the Committee.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

121. ACTION MONITORING

The Committee's Action Monitoring report was considered by Members. In response to a query it was noted that the information on the costs of the additional meeting of the Executive Committee on 26th November 2013 had not yet been supplied to Councillor Brunner.

122. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that

Under S.100 I of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following matter on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12 (A) of the said Act, as amended:

Minute 123 – Public Services Network Compliance at Redditch Borough Council

123. PUBLIC SERVICES NETWORK COMPLIANCE AT REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

The Committee received a report on the requirement for the Authority to achieve compliance with the Public Services Network (formerly known as the Government Secure eXtranet) in order for the Authority to continue to access services.

It was reported that the Public Services Network was “owned “and managed by the Cabinet Office and that a zero-tolerance approach to compliance was being taken. It had been made very clear that Authorities would lose their connection to the GSX and future PSN should they not fully meet all PSN requirements. This would mean that the Borough Council would be unable to manage citizen benefits and transfer secure information to partners such as the Police and the NHS. In addition it would prevent future Plans to implement Individual Electoral Registration from June 2014.

The report informed Members of some of the steps which were required to be taken to demonstrate a genuine intention to achieve compliance. This included upgrades to existing systems and replacement equipment to enable officers and Members to have remote access to PSN systems from home or other locations. The

actions required would need to be undertaken in stages and as well as the actions which were required to be undertaken and funded in 2013/14, additional funding would need to be included in the budget setting process for 2014/15.

It was stressed in response to queries from Members that the Council's systems had always been required to be compliant in terms of security, but that the Cabinet Office had now amended the definitions of compliance. Many other Local Authorities were in a similar position to the Borough Council.

Members were concerned at the attitude taken by the Cabinet Office, particularly in a time of great financial restraint and in view of the fact there had been no major issues or breaches of security. It was recognised however that the Council had little option but to undertake the steps required to demonstrate a move towards a position of compliance.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) an increase to the 2013/14 Capital Programme of £90,000, to be funded from borrowing be approved;**
- 2) the borrowing costs be released from balances in 2013/14 and be included as unavoidable pressures in the 2014/15 Medium Term Financial Plan; and**
- 3) the release of £39,000 from balances in 2013/14 to fund the associated revenue costs be approved.**

(The majority of the discussion on this item took place prior to the exclusion of the press and the public. Members did however discuss matters relating to the procurement of equipment and services and this necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to exclude the press and public during that part of the debate on the grounds that information would be revealed which would relate to the financial or business affairs of a particular person (including the authority holding that information))

124. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES/REFERRALS (IF ANY)

There were no confidential minutes or referrals.