

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 9 June 2015

MINUTES

Present:

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

Officers:

Rebecca Dunne, Clare Flanagan, Deb Poole and Amanda de Warr

Committee Services Officer:

Debbie Parker-Jones

136. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Pat Witherspoon.

137. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

138. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Work Programme

It was noted that the following reports which had been scheduled for consideration at the meeting had been deferred to a later date:

- Reorganisation and Change Policy – rescheduled to July;
- Disposal of Matchborough West Community Centre – July;
- Leisure Services Review – potential item for June meeting but to be considered in July;
- Modifications to the Borough of Redditch Plan No.4 – September; and
- Applying Article 4 Directions to the Council's Schedule of Locally Listed Buildings – December.

.....
Chair

139. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 14th April 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

140. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7th April 2015.

It was noted that there were no recommendations to consider as the recommendation at Minute No. 97 relating to the Future Management of Redditch Market – Pre-Scrutiny had been dealt with by the Executive at its last meeting.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7th April 2015 be received and noted.

141. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY POLICY

Members were asked to agree for recommendation to full Council an updated Equal Opportunity Policy.

The Policy incorporated a specific Disability Policy and consolidated ongoing work around the Equality Act 2010, which had included a series of workshops during 2013 and 2014 developed after different elements of the Equality Act had come into force.

All of the Council's trade unions had been consulted on the Policy and were in agreement with this. The Provision of Support Networks for the LGBT Community Task Group had also seen and supported the Policy.

Officers confirmed that the Policy applied to Council employees aged 18 years or over, and that younger employees, including for example apprentices, were subject to separate legislation. Members proposed that the Policy be amended to reflect that separate legislation applied to any employees under the age of 18.

RECOMMENDED that

subject to an amendment to the Policy to reflect that employees under the age of 18 were subject to separate

legislation, the Equal Opportunity Policy appended to the report be approved and adopted.

142. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

The Committee received a report which proposed no change to the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2016/17, which Members were required to review annually. The report also set out data in relation to the take up of the Hardship Fund and other measures which showed the impact of the Scheme on collection rates and recovery action.

Members were advised that there had been only a small increase in the number of rent accounts in arrears, with Housing Officers having reported that it was not possible to make a clear link between the changes to Council Tax Support and rent arrears. Recovery action was said to be in line with what was to be expected when compared with other authorities.

Less than half of the 2014/15 Hardship Fund budget had been spent, which again was in keeping with other authorities who had introduced a similar scheme. The surplus of the budget would carry over to 2015/16 and Officers had worked proactively with a total of 211 customers through the Hardship Scheme. In doing so they had provided budget advice and support to identify where other financial support could be offered. Where possible, the Council avoided taking bailiff action against those affected by the change to support and instead attempted to establish alternative means of collecting Council Tax. Members expressed their gratitude to all Officers involved with the Scheme, which provided transitional support and assistance to the most vulnerable.

In response to a Member question, Officers stated that Universal Credit had not impacted or been particularly problematic at this stage, with the only notable issue relating to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) computer systems. Officers were working closely with the DWP on people data to provide relevant information.

RESOLVED that

- 1) no changes be made to the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2016/17; and**
- 2) the contents of the report in relation to take up of the Hardship Fund and other measures data be noted.**

143. WRITE OFF OF DEBTS 2014-15

Members were presented with a report detailing the level of write offs of debts due to the Council for the 2014/15 financial year.

The current bad debts provisions were noted, which Officers advised were adequate in relation to the levels of write offs and outstanding debt.

Timing issues, for example when invoices were sent out, together with differing debt types were factors which did not make it easy to compare debt levels on a year-on-year basis. The introduction of the Council's new finance system in March 2015 had also impacted on available data. Officers stated however that the authority's level of write offs were relatively low and represented a similar picture to other authorities.

Non Domestic Rates and the liquidation/winding of businesses represented the highest level of write offs. Whilst Officers made every effort to pursue debts before writing them off collection rates had fallen in this area as recovery action might not be pursued so rigorously where to do so might create a business more problems. Officers worked with the North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration team where necessary to determine the best course of action in such cases.

Officers adjudged when it was either not reasonable or uneconomic to recover debts. Work on housing benefits overpayments in particular was extremely labour intensive and there was a requirement for the Council to act on data received from HM Revenue and Customs within a set timeframe, with failure to do so resulting in an error being logged against the Council.

RESOLVED that

the contents of the report be noted.

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

There were no outstanding referrals for the Committee to consider.

145. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

RESOLVED that

the report and update be noted.

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 9 June 2015

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 7.36 pm

.....
Chair