

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 13 December 2016

MINUTES

Present:

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

Also Present:

Councillors Tom Baker-Price and Jane Potter – for Minute No's 53 and 54

Officers:

Jess Bayley, Michael Birkinshaw, Clare Flanagan, John Godwin, Sue Hanley, Jayne Pickering, David Riley and Judith Willis

Committee Services Officer:

Debbie Parker-Jones

49. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Brandon Clayton.

50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

51. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Work Programme

The following reports which were due to be considered, or possibly considered, at the meeting had been deferred to a later date:

- Council Plan (including leisure intervention update);
- Corporate Performance Strategy;
- Economic Priorities for Redditch – Annual Report;
- Staff Survey – preliminary actions;
- Housing Business Case; and
- Health Commission – report of findings.

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Chair

Additional Papers

One set of Additional Papers had been circulated prior to the meeting which comprised an extract of the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 6th December 2016.

The Minutes extract included:

- a re-worded Lifeline recommendation for Agenda Item 6;
- withdrawal of the broadcasting of Council meetings recommendation and report at Agenda Item 7; and
- an additional fees and charges recommendation for Agenda Item 10.

Overview and Scrutiny – referrals, pre-scrutiny and Working Group reports

As there were a number of Overview and Scrutiny matters / referrals for noting / consideration the Leader stated that reference would be made to these at the appropriate points in the agenda.

Councillors Potter and Baker-Price, Chairs of the Budget Scrutiny and Performance Scrutiny Working Groups respectively, were in attendance to present the Working Groups' reports and recommendations, and were accompanied by Jess Bayley, author of the reports.

52. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 1st November 2016 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

53. REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE BUDGET SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP

Councillor Jane Potter, Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group, presented the Working Group's report. Councillor Potter explained the background to the report and the Working Group's recommendations, which detailed proposals in relation to future delivery of the Shopmobility Service and management of the Town Hall and other property assets. It was noted that page 139 of the agenda (25th October 2016 Overview and Scrutiny Committee minutes) also detailed these recommendations.

Members supported the recommendations and in doing so noted that Officers had, for some time, been working on a number of

service developments. Meetings were also taking place with the Place Partnership regarding further efficiencies with the Council's property assets. A Member requested that when considering the Town Hall the kitchen located in the basement area, which had been out of use for a number of years, also be looked at.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Head of Community Services considers and works through the various options for the future delivery of the Shopmobility service and reports back to Members in due course;**
- 2) the Council should consider ways to manage the Town Hall and other property assets in a more cost effective manner; and**
- 3) the report be noted.**

54. REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP

Members received two reports of the Performance Scrutiny Working Group. The first report related to the Lifeline Service and the second to the proposed broadcasting of Council meetings. Members' attention was drawn to the Additional Papers pack circulated prior to the meeting, which comprised an extract of the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee meeting held on 6th December 2016.

The minutes extract included a reworded Lifeline recommendation which Members were asked to consider instead of the recommendation set out in the main agenda papers. Members' attention was also drawn to the O&S Committee's decision in relation to the Working Group's recording of public committee meetings recommendation, which whilst noting the merit of this, was not agreed by O&S. As such, the recommendation and report in relation to the recording of meetings was withdrawn from the Executive Committee agenda.

Councillor Baker-Price, Chair of the Performance Scrutiny Working Group, presented the Lifeline report. Councillor Baker-Price explained the background to the report and the Working Group's reworded recommendation, which related to a marketing strategy for the Lifeline Service and potential increased revenue to subsidise the Service.

Members supported the recommendation and, in doing so, noted work which was currently being undertaken by Officers to enhance the Service.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Head of Community Services be mandated to explore how the Lifeline Service can incorporate a resource within the Service and produce a marketing strategy, in co-operation with the Communications Team to:**
 - a) **better market Lifeline Services to residents;**
 - b) **develop new business opportunities to subsidise the Service; and**
 - c) **the report be noted; and**
- 2) **it be noted that the second recommendation and report of the Performance Scrutiny Working Group, in relation to the proposed trial broadcasting of Council meetings, had been withdrawn from the Executive Committee agenda in light of the recommendation having been defeated at Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6th December 2016.**

55. DEBT RECOVERY POLICY

Members received a report which sought approval of a revised Debt Recovery Policy (the Policy) for the Council.

The Policy, which consolidated existing Council policies, aimed to balance the needs of the Council in recovering payments and of those who were struggling to pay, particularly vulnerable people and those with mental health problems. The Policy enabled the Council to take a holistic approach to debt collection, ensuring that priority debts of greatest value to the Council were recovered first. It was noted that the Policy did not take account of rent arrears which were dealt with under the Housing Services rent arrears guidance manual.

RESOLVED that

the revised Debt Recovery Policy, as appended to the report, be adopted with immediate effect.

56. APPOINTMENT PROCESS FOR EXTERNAL AUDITORS

Members considered a report which detailed proposals for the appointment of the external auditor to the Council for the 2018/19 accounts and beyond.

It was noted that the current auditors were working under a contract originally let by the Audit Commission and that the contract was novated to Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) following closure of the Audit Commission. If the Council was to take advantage of the national scheme for appointing auditors to be operated by PSAA, a decision was required at this stage in order for the Council to accept PSAA's invitation by early March 2017.

Officers explained the benefits of the PSAA option and the alternative more resource-intensive option of establishing an independent audit panel. It was noted that only nine providers would be eligible to audit local authorities, all of which were national firms. Officers added that neighbouring authorities within the County were also intending to go along the PSAA route.

RECOMMENDED that

the Council accepts the invitation from Public Sector Audit Appointments to 'opt in' to the sector-led option for the appointment of external auditors for five financial years commencing 1st April 2018.

57. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2017/18 - 2020/21 - UPDATE

Members received an Officer presentation on current progress against the Medium Term Financial Plan. It was noted that a similar presentation had been given at the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee meeting on 6th December 2016, which O&S had resolved to note.

Officers explained the Medium Term Financial Plan process so far, which had included production of an Efficiency Plan for the Department for Communities and Local Government, development of 4-year budget projections and a 4-year Capital Programme. There had been a full review of all fees and charges, including areas where the Council could be more commercial in its approach whilst ensuring that facilities were accessible to all residents. The budget assumptions had also been approved. It was noted that the Government's Autumn Statement for 2016 had given no detail in relation to the New Homes Bonus or Business Rates, with settlement figures expected to be announced on 15th December. Officers confirmed that they would issue a briefing note to Members on the settlement figures on 16th December.

In relation to budget savings, Heads of Service had reviewed all service costs and income, and had reduced any budgets which had not been spent in service delivery in previous years. Savings which could be made without impacting on service delivery had been identified in order to release capacity moving forward. Areas of achievable additional income had also been identified. The Capital Programme had been reviewed to ensure that this delivered on the Council's Strategic Purposes, and Officers were currently preparing plans for alternative service provision for reporting to the Executive Committee in January. Heads of Service had considered cost recovery of services delivered and there would be proposed increases to the budget based on current service demands, including potential costs arising from the rollout of Universal Credit and the impact of this on families.

The current financial position for 2017/18 – 2019/20 was outlined, which detailed year-on-year savings and budget pressures. The 2017/18 shortfall stood at just over £1m, with the Council's reserves currently standing at £1.9m. 2018/19 saw same level of shortfall, with 2019/20 and 2020/21 shortfalls being £1.56m and just under £1.7m respectively. Whilst the shortfalls were significantly less than had previously been reported there were still gaps in information, with the New Homes Bonus being the main area of concern at this stage.

Heads of Service would be assessing the implications of the final settlement figures and a report on this would be referred to the Executive in January/February. There would be a Housing Revenue Account and Capital report in January and the budget setting would take place in February. The Council's balances would be reviewed and 156 money-saving suggestions had been received from members of staff. Officers would consider these and include any relevant suggestions in future budget reports.

It was noted that both Members and Officers had undertaken a lot of hard work on the budget and Members expressed their thanks to staff for the suggestions put forward.

RESOLVED that

the Medium Term Financial Plan update position be noted.

58. FEES AND CHARGES 2017/18

The Committee considered the fees and charges to be levied on services provided by the Council, which were also to be used as the basis for income targets in the Medium Term Financial Plan 2017/18 – 2019/20. Members considered with the report the minute

extract of the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee's meeting of 6th December 2015, which had been circulated as Additional Papers. In addition to resolving to note the report, O&S had put forward an additional recommendation that the charge for a single unit bulky waste collection be increased from the proposed fee of £8.20 to £10.00.

Members considered the recommendation but did not support this. In reaching their decision Members noted that whilst the proposed increase would generate approximately £2,000 in additional income, there had been recent press reports of increased fly-tipping within the Borough which Members felt might be made worse if the proposed single unit bulky waste collection fee were to further increase. Members also noted the proposed change to bulky waste charges dependent on the size of an item, as detailed at page 94 of the agenda. This allowed for flexibility based on 'unit' size, with further reduced rates also applying to additional items.

Officers responded to a number of questions from Members on the proposed fees and charges, including legal recovery costs, crematorium/cemetery fees and repairs and maintenance fees associated with the hiring of equipment from the Palace Theatre.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the fees and charges included in Appendix 1 to the report which have a proposed increase for 2017/18 over the currently agreed budget assumption of 3% be approved; and**

RESOLVED that

- 2) the fees and charges as presented in Appendix 1 to the report that have no increase for 2017/18 be approved;**
- 3) the fees and charges as presented in Appendix 1 to the report that have reduced for 2017/18 be approved; and**
- 4) the fees and charges as presented in Appendix 1 to the report that have an increase of 3% for 2017/18 be approved.**

59. FINANCE MONITORING QUARTER 2 2016/17

The Committee received a report which detailed the Council's final financial position for the General Fund Revenue, Capital and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the period April to September 2016 (Quarter 2 2016/17).

Officers advised that with the introduction of the new finance system they were in future hoping to bring forward quarterly monitoring by a month.

The revenue and capital underspends of £284k and £770k respectively were noted. The revenue savings included additional income received for services provided and managed vacant posts, and were offset by shortfalls in income on the leisure centres and golf course, together with efficiency targets that were due to be delivered later in the financial year. It was noted that should the £284k be realised a share of this would be refunded back to the HRA, which would reduce the underspend to £171k. In relation to the HRA Revenue Outturn at Appendix 2 to the report, Officers advised that where zeros appeared these categories should be removed from the report.

Officers responded to Members' questions and comments and advised that, from a performance management perspective, they were looking to bring separate performance management and financial monitoring reports to Executive in future. Further to previous discussions, the issue of ongoing vacant posts was again raised. Officers explained the current policy in relation to the filling of vacant posts and the use of agency staff, and confirmed that they would contact Members outside of the meeting to advise them of the current number of vacant posts. As part of the 2017/18 budget round the Senior Management Team would be looking at any vacancies and discussing these with Heads of Service, details of which would then be referred to Members as part of the budget process.

Concerns were raised by one Member in relation to current staffing arrangements within the Community Safety Team. Officers confirmed that this was being dealt with and agreed to provide Members with details of the proposed future arrangements.

RESOLVED that

the current financial positions for the quarter April to September 2016, as detailed in the report, be noted.

60. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 25th October 2016.

It was noted that there were no recommendations to consider as the Medium Term Financial Plan – Budget Assumptions recommendation at Minute No. 35 had been dealt with at the previous meeting of the Executive Committee, and the Performance

Scrutiny Working Group's Lifeline recommendation at Minute No. 38 had been included Working Group's report at agenda item 6 – Minute No. 54 above refers.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 25th October 2016 be received and noted.

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

Members were advised that they were not, at that stage, required to consider the 6th December 2016 Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recharges recommendation at Minute No. 50 of the Additional Papers pack as the report detailing the background to this would be considered by the Executive Committee in January.

It was further noted that the remaining recommendation at Minute No. 50 in relation to Members' attendance at training sessions was a recommendation for the Member Support Steering Group, as the appropriate body to decide on this.

RESOLVED that

the position be noted.

62. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

It was noted that the meeting of the Planning Advisory Panel (PAP) which had been due to take place that evening had been cancelled as the final version of the Inspector's report was not available for presentation. The next PAP meeting would therefore take place in the New Year.

RESOLVED that

the report and PAP position be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.28 pm

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Chair