

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 23 October 2018

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), Councillor David Bush (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Tom Baker-Price, Greg Chance, Brandon Clayton, Bill Hartnett, Gareth Prosser, Mike Rouse and Craig Warhurst

Officers:

Matthew Bough, Kevin Dicks, Clare Flanagan, Jayne Pickering and Judith Willis

Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley

42. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

43. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

44. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair circulated a written update on the Leader's Announcements.

45. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 11th September 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

46. HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY - UPDATE

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Team Leader presented the proposed updates to the Housing Allocations Policy. Officers had

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Chair

been reviewing the policy and the flexibilities provided to Councils in the Localism Act 2011 and the report highlighted changes that officers were proposing to the policy to reflect this.

Following the publication of the agenda for the Executive Committee meeting Officers had suggested further changes to the policy which were circulated for Members' consideration in a written handout (Appendix 1). This suggested that applicants who were volunteers must be volunteering with a registered charity at the point of application for their status as a volunteer to be taken into account. The changes also removed reference to lone parents who were the primary carer of a child in receipt of child benefit for that child.

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Team Leader highlighted the following additional changes to the policy that were proposed in the report:

- Officers were proposing that an applicant should have a local connection to be eligible to apply for affordable housing, unless they could be categorised as having a “reasonable preference” in line with legislation. Under the existing policy anybody could apply for affordable housing from the Council.
- Officers were proposing to replace the current gold, silver and bronze banding system with bands 1 to 6. Those in band 1 would be those considered to be most in need. Those in Band 4 were in a reduced priority band but might have a “reasonable preference”. Band 5 related to applicants with few issues and band 6 would encompass applicants who had access to their own financial resources.
- It was proposed that the bedroom standard should change to mirror requirements in the Housing Benefits system. Under these arrangements children of the same sex could be expected to share a room up to the age of 16 whilst those of different sexes would be expected to share a room up to the age of 10.
- It was proposed that key workers, such as nurses should be provided with additional preference to help access housing. Officers had incorporated the HMRC's definition of a key worker into the policy
- The minimum age of applicants would rise from 16 to 18, should the proposed changes in the policy be agreed. The earliest that a young person could secure a tenancy was at the age of 18 so this change would reflect that. Care leavers would be excluded from this policy requirement.

Following the presentation of the report Members discussed the proposed changes to the policy in some detail and highlighted a number of points:

- The need for a Housing Allocations Policy that would be fair to applicants. Members expressed the hope that the changes to the policy would make it fairer for Redditch residents.
- The change to the policy that recognised the role of key workers. Members welcomed this proposed amendment and noted that key workers made a valuable contribution to the local community.
- The crisis in housing at a national level and the action that needed to be taken to ensure affordable housing was available to those who needed it.
- The work that had been undertaken over a series of months to update the Council's Housing Allocations Policy.
- The approach that the Council would adopt to distributing properties amongst applicants in the different bands. Officers advised that the properties would be allocated to those in most need through band first and the remaining properties would be allocated through the choice based lettings system. There was no proposal to allocate percentages to different bands
- The number of bids for properties that applicants could place, should the proposed changes to the policy be agreed. Officers advised that applicants would retain the right to make two bids for different properties per week.
- The consultation process in respect of the proposed changes to the policy, who would be engaged and how. Officers explained that a questionnaire would be accessible on the Council's website, through social media and in a paper form.

During consideration of this item an amendment was proposed by Councillor Bill Hartnett, which involved the introduction of an additional recommendation. This was seconded by Councillor Greg Chance.

The proposed additional recommendation stated the following:

"The results of the consultation on the Housing Allocations Policy 2019 are brought back to the Executive for consideration, then go forward to Council."

In proposing the new recommendation Councillor Hartnett explained that he felt it was important for the Executive Committee and Council to have a chance to see the final draft of the Housing Allocations Policy before it was enacted.

Members discussed the proposed amendment and in so doing noted that the Housing Allocations Policy would need to return to the Executive Committee and Council anyway for approval in line with the requirements of the decision making process. As this involved changes to the Council's policy framework a final decision

would always have to be taken by Council. Therefore a number of Members rejected the proposal as being unnecessary.

On being put to the vote the proposed amendment was lost.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the draft Housing Allocations Policy 2019 be consulted upon for a six week period and;**
- 2) the consultation questions (detailed at Appendix 2 to the report) be approved.**

47. VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR GRANTS PROGRAMME

The Head of Community Services presented the Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Programme Report 2019/20. Members were advised that the report proposed changes to the grants system, whereby each Councillor would be allocated a budget of £5,000 that they could use to provide financial support to initiatives within their ward or across the whole Borough. In the report Officers were suggesting that this approach to grant funding should be trialled for one year. Should Members agree to change the grants process the Council's Grants Policy would need to be reviewed by the Executive Committee and this, together with guidance in relation to the new framework, would be reported to the Executive Committee in due course.

Members discussed the proposals in some detail and raised the following points during this debate:

- The Grants Panel had been working for many years to review applications for grants.
- Concerns were raised that often the same organisations applied for grant funding from the Grants Panel and funding was often awarded to those organisations with experienced bid writers, even though groups that did not have this expertise might want to deliver a good project in the community.
- Members also raised concerns that the existing grants process was bureaucratic and resource intensive. However, concerns were also raised that there would still be some bureaucracy arising from the proposed new scheme as Officers would need to consider funding agreements for all 29 Members.
- The Grants Panel was a cross-party group and operated in an apolitical fashion. Decisions were made based on reaching a consensus.

- Decisions made by the Grants Panel under the existing system enabled Members to award funding that matched the Council's strategic purposes. Concerns were raised that under the proposed new scheme this might not happen.
- However, the proposed new system would enable Members to provide financial support to groups that met the needs of residents living in their wards. Members could use their local knowledge to direct their funding choices.
- Members questioned how groups would be monitored to ensure that the grants they received were spent on the projects for which they had received the funding. The Committee was advised that the guidance would set out the criteria for groups to be eligible to receive a grant.
- The checks that would be undertaken in relation to organisations that were applying for funding were also questioned. Officers explained that the guidance would require Members to provide funding only to registered charities. However, the Council would not be checking the levels of reserves retained by those charities.
- Training would need to be provided to all Members to enable them to approve grants in line with the Council's guidance.
- The Council would be required to publish details in respect of the grants that were agreed by Members. Legally the Council was required to publish any spending over £500.
- Concerns were raised that some groups might apply for funding from every Councillor without Members being aware of the situation and this could lead to an unfair distribution of funding. Officers explained that all proposed funds would need to be processed by Officers and they would identify groups that were seeking support from every Member.
- Further concerns were raised that Members could use the funds for political purposes, for example close to a local election. However, it was also noted that under the rule Members would not be able to approve funding during the election period.
- There would be the potential for Members to pool resources within wards and this could involve working with Members of another political party.
- Members commented that some Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations had expressed concerns about the proposed changes to the process during the consultation period. However, it was also noted that change could be unnerving and some groups had welcomed the suggested changes.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **the VCS Grants Programme change from a corporate competitive grant giving process to one where funding**

proposals are made from Ward Councillors for qualifying organisations – a Councillor Community Grants Scheme;

- 2) £5,000 is made available to each Ward Councillor to support VCS organisations, and /or VCS led projects and initiatives in their ward or the wider Borough;
- 3) during 2019/20 a minimum of £350 be dedicated from each Councillor's allocation to project(s) which promote cultural awareness and cultural cohesion;
- 4) the new programme be piloted for a year;
- 5) the Head of Community Services be given delegated authority to sign off funding proposals;
- 6) a refreshed VCS Grants Policy and Guidance Notes for the Councillor Community Grants Scheme be drafted and considered at a future meeting of the Executive Committee; and
- 7) funding received from the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) Recycling of Metal Recovered from Cremation Scheme be allocated as part of an application process and decided by a panel of members.

48. SHAREHOLDER COMMITTEE - LOCAL AUTHORITY TRADING COMPANY

The Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Resources presented a report that outlined proposals for the introduction of the Shareholders Committee for the Leisure company that was approved by Council in September 2018.

Since that Council meeting the company had been named Rubicon Leisure. The Shareholders Committee of Rubicon Leisure would have a number of powers and responsibilities. The Council was the single shareholder in the leisure company and was in a position to delegate all of the relevant powers, including reserved matters, to the Shareholders Committee. This governance structure was considered to be preferable to placing Members on the board of Rubicon Leisure. In other parts of the country where Members had been appointed to the board of a company this had created conflicts of interest and had caused problems for the Councils concerned.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **a Shareholder Committee is established of 5 members. The Committee to take the form of 3 members from the controlling group and 2 members from the opposition; and**
- 2) **the reserved matters as detailed in paragraph 3.3 of the report be delegated to the Shareholder Committee.**

49. PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Resources presented the performance report for the strategic purpose 'provide good things for me to do, see and visit'. This was the first performance report that had been presented in a revised format that was designed to tell a narrative about the strategic purpose. There had been a number of positive developments in relation to this strategic purpose, including a decrease in the numbers on the waiting list for swimming lessons and an increase in the provision of swimming lessons for beginners. The Council had invested in redevelopment of the studio space at the Abbey Stadium and this had had a positive impact on attendance rates at the venue. However, unfortunately the Council had not been successful with its Heritage Lottery park funding application for Forge Mill.

Information about the Council's performance in relation to sickness absence levels amongst staff had also been included in the report. There had been an increase in sickness levels, partly due to viruses within the workplace. However, it was also suggested that there may have been an improvement in terms of managers reporting their staff's sickness absence properly. Staff would be offered appropriate assistance to help manage any problems with sickness.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

50. BUDGET FRAMEWORK AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2019/20 TO 2022/23 - PRESENTATION

The Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Resources delivered a presentation on the subject of the Council's budget framework and the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (Appendix 2). During the delivery of the presentation she highlighted the following matters for Members' consideration:

- There remained some gaps in the budget that would need to be addressed through making savings and increasing the income of the Council over the following four years.
- The Council would receive £35,000 in revenue support grant from the government in 2018/19.
- Officers were being prudent and were still taking into account the potential impact that the negative grant could have on the Council's finances in the future.
- However, the negative grant was subject to consultation, the terms of which indicated that the government was considering withdrawing this arrangement, though no decision had been taken yet on this matter.
- In the event that the negative grant was withdrawn this would have a beneficial impact on the Council's finances, though there would still be a need to achieve savings moving forward.
- Officers remained concerned that there could be further changes made to the New Homes Bonus scheme which would have a negative impact on the Council's finances.
- Income from business rates remained uncertain and again this could impact on the Council's financial position.
- The Council allocated just over £5 million of the general fund to capital spending. This was used for works on Council buildings, including to address issues with asbestos.
- Members were advised that when the Council did not receive planning fees for anticipated developments this could have financial implications for the Council, which lost the fee, the New Homes Bonus funding and any Council Tax that would have been due if the development had progressed.
- The roll out of universal credit was placing significant pressure on the Benefits Team. The Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Resources was working with the Chief Executive in an attempt to help relieve these pressures.
- There remained just over £700,000 in unidentified savings which Officers were aiming to find by the end of October 2018.
- The Council had £1 million more in balances than was required as a minimum level by the Section 151 Officer.
- The Government's requirement for Councils to reduce rents for Council housing by 1 per cent per year over a four year period had meant that the Council had lost £130 million from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) over a 30 year period.
- Fees and charges were being reviewed in a slightly different way than in previous years. Heads of Service were required to review the fees for their departments, taking into account whether they could achieve full cost recovery, why they were charging for services, and how the charges helped the Council to meet its strategic purposes.
- Officers continued to explore different ways of doing things in order to reduce costs. The Council needed to get better in

terms of offering digital solutions to those who wanted to access the authority's services online.

- The Council was aiming to increase capital revenue through work in line with the Council's Investments and Acquisition Strategy. Any proposals would be reported to the Executive Committee.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

51. CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE - ACTION PLAN

The Chief Executive presented a report on the subject of the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge that had been undertaken at the start of the calendar year and the action plan that had been developed to address the issues raised during the challenge. The challenge had been undertaken by colleagues from other local authorities and it had been conducted as a critical friend exercise. Members were asked to note that the Corporate Peer Challenge had been a joint exercise reviewing services delivered by Redditch Borough and Bromsgrove District Councils.

The feedback report, which had been produced at the end of the Corporate Peer Challenge, had been sent to the Council in the previous municipal year. However, a decision had been taken to postpone consideration of the report until the local elections had taken place and then there had been a further delay to enable the new political administration to settle in before discussing the matter further.

The feedback report contained a range of recommendations to enhance services across the two Councils. One of the key proposals had been for the Council to introduce a single workforce for the two authorities. The Corporate Management Team (CMT) had reviewed this proposal and, having undertaken a lot of work on staff harmonisation and being in the process of a review of the two Councils' job evaluation schemes, senior officers had concluded that a single workforce was not viable at this stage. However, it was possible that this proposal would be revisited in the future.

Members were asked to note that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had pre-scrutinised the report at their meeting on 18th October. During their discussions the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had concluded that actions 10 and 11 in the Corporate Peer Challenge action plan should only apply to Bromsgrove District Council and that this should be clarified within the plan. The Chief Executive explained that recommendation 8 related specifically to Bromsgrove District Council, with regards to the

conduct of the political debate at that authority. Recommendations 9, 10 and 11 all related to updating the Councils' constitutions, which was already happening in Redditch.

Members discussed the report and commented on the following matters during this debate:

- The "Lead Officer" column and the references to the "Leader" within this column. Officers confirmed that this was referring to the Leaders of the Councils in Redditch and Bromsgrove rather than to political party group leaders.
- The references in the same column to "Cabinet" and whether this applied just to Bromsgrove District Council. Officers advised that in the majority of cases this should have involved referring to both the Executive Committee and Cabinet.
- The reference in the action plan to regular meetings between the Executive Committee and Bromsgrove District Council's Cabinet starting in November. Members questioned when these meetings would start to take place and whether those who were not Portfolio Holders would be attending.
- The value of retaining workforces for both Redditch Borough Council and Bromsgrove District Council.
- The current decision making process in Redditch whereby many decisions were taken by Council rather than the Executive Committee. Members commented that this ensured that the decision making process was inclusive.

During consideration of this matter Councillor Hartnett proposed an amendment. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Greg Chance.

The amendment stated the following:

"Agree to note the action plan with the following amendments. Not to support recommendations 9, 10 and 11."

In proposing the amendment Councillor Hartnett commented that he did not feel a fundamental review of Redditch Borough Council's constitution was required. He explained that he agreed with the conclusions that had been reached by the Overview and Committee that recommendations 10 and 11 should not apply to Redditch but were more relevant to Bromsgrove District Council. Councillor Hartnett informed Members that he did not support the assumption in recommendation 10 that boundaries between officers and Members needed clarifying in Redditch nor did he feel that the Council's procedures needed to be reviewed to support constructive debate at Council meetings as he felt that this was already working well.

In responding to the proposed amendment Members considered the work that had been undertaken during the Corporate Peer Challenge. Members commented that in order to make the most of the Corporate Peer Challenge the Council needed to take into account any advice that had been given and to learn lessons. It was also noted that a review of the constitution could be useful as it helped to make the decision making process more efficient.

The Chief Executive advised that recommendations 10 and 11 related to the review of the constitution and it was recognised by Officers that these were more relevant to Bromsgrove District Council than to Redditch Borough Council. Members were asked to note that the action plan had been drafted some months ago. Since the document was produced a significant number of changes had been agreed to the Council's constitution at the September meeting of Council. The Council had been advised to review the constitution as those undertaking the Corporate Peer Challenge had suggested that by taking everything to Council this could stymie the speed of the decision making process.

On being put to the vote the amendment was lost.

RESOLVED that

the letter and action plan arising from the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge, which took place in January and February 2018, be noted.

52. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair noted that there were no outstanding recommendations for Members' consideration as these had been addressed during the previous meeting of the Executive Committee.

RESOLVED that

the minutes from the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 6th September 2018 be noted.

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

The Chair confirmed that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had made recommendations in respect of the Corporate Peer Challenge and Housing Growth Programme at their latest meeting on 18th October 2018. These proposals would be considered by the Executive Committee during the debates in respect of the relevant items.

54. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORTS

Members provided the following updates on the work of particular Advisory Panels and groups.

- a) Constitutional Review Working Party – Chair, Councillor Matthew Dormer

Councillor Dormer advised that the latest meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Party, that had been due to take place on 24th November, had been postponed. This would provide Officers with time to work on a project to reduce the amount of paperwork that was produced for Committee meetings.

- b) Corporate Parenting Board – Redditch Borough Council representative, Councillor Gareth Prosser

Councillor Prosser advised that the latest meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board had taken place on 11th October 2018. During this meeting attendees had received information about the Kinship Service in Worcestershire as well as the Virtual School Governing Board (VSGB). The VSGB was designed to improve support available to looked after children at school. A website was in the process of being developed for the VSGB which would provide further information about its purpose.

Members were advised that Councillor Prosser would be meeting with a representative of Worcestershire County Council to discuss the role of the Corporate Parenting Board later in the month.

Councillor Baker-Price informed Members that he would be hosting a Corporate Parenting event on 31st October 2018. Members would be welcome to attend to learn more about their roles as Corporate Parents.

- c) Grants Panel – Chair, Councillor Greg Chance

Councillor Chance advised Members that the next meeting of the Grants Panel would take place the following day. During this meeting Members would consider bids for grants.

- d) Member Support Steering Group – Chair, Councillor Dormer

Councillor Dormer advised that the latest meeting of the Member Support Steering Group took place on 16th October. During this meeting Members had received an update on IT

support and had considered information about training that had recently been delivered to Members. The group had also discussed a project that had been launched by Officers to review how to reduce the amount of paperwork generated for Committee meetings. Councillor Dormer concluded by urging Members to attend the training that was due to be delivered on 10th December in respect of the measures dashboard.

e) Planning Advisory Panel – Chair, Councillor Dormer

Councillor Dormer advised Members that a meeting of the Planning Advisory Panel (PAP) would take place in November, though the exact date remained to be confirmed.

Members noted that no meeting of PAP had taken place since March 2018. Questions were also raised about meetings of the Economic Development Theme Group. The Chief Executive explained that this theme group was not included in the updates as it was not an advisory panel. However, he confirmed that the group continued to meet.

55. COUNCIL HOUSING GROWTH PROGRAMME - PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT SITES

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Team Leader presented a report in respect of proposed development sites for the Housing Growth Project. The Executive Committee had agreed the Housing Growth Programme some months ago and this report called for Members to endorse proposals for the development of Council houses in particular locations within the Borough. The majority of the sites that had been identified were HRA assets. The exception to this was the Hawthorn Road Community Centre (former Redditch Play Council site), which was a General Fund asset. Officers were proposing that to ensure consistency the Hawthorn Road site should be transferred to the HRA.

In many cases Officers were aiming to develop two bedroom bungalows as demand for this type of property was high. Members were advised that Officers would report back to the Executive Committee about the proposals for each site for approval.

Redditch Borough Council had not worked on developing new Council house properties since the 1990s and there was no longer the expertise in-house to work on this. Therefore Officers were proposing to go out to tender to work with an external specialist on this project.

During consideration of this item Members noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had pre-scrutinised the Housing Growth

Programme – Proposed Development sites report at their meeting on 18th October 2018. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had concluded their discussions of the item by endorsing the proposals detailed in the report.

Members discussed the report in detail and noted that funding for the Housing Growth Programme had been provided from the HRA. To date the Council had already purchased some properties under the Housing Growth Programme and some one-bedroom flats were due to be purchased shortly. For the new sites it was confirmed that all of the properties that would be developed would be Council houses. Officers had not yet looked at the detail in terms of the type of properties that would be built, beyond considering whether these should be bungalows, houses and so on. This information would be reported to the Executive Committee when the plans for each site were considered, though the timeframes for this could not yet be confirmed.

The Committee recognised that the Housing Growth Programme would also enable the Council to meet its obligations in respect of the Housing Allocations Policy. There had been a reduction in the number of Council houses owned by the Council over the last few decades, primarily due to Right to Buy, and therefore it was important for the Council to replace these properties in order to meet demand. The new properties would also have a positive impact on the Council's income as each tenant would be required to pay rent.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the sites in Appendix 1 be included in Phase 1 of the HRA (Housing Revenue Account) new build programme and proposals to progress the development of HRA new build council housing on them be approved;**
- 2) properties delivered through the Council Housing Growth Programme be let at Affordable Rent, where permitted; and**

RECOMMENDED

- 3) the appropriation of the Hawthorn Road site from the General Fund into the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) in order that it can be developed for new council housing.**