



Council

Monday, 20 January 2020

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Michael Chalk (Mayor), and Councillors Salman Akbar, Joe Baker, Tom Baker-Price, Roger Bennett, Joanne Beecham, Juliet Brunner, Debbie Chance, Greg Chance, Brandon Clayton, Matthew Dormer, John Fisher, Peter Fleming, Andrew Fry, Julian Grubb, Bill Hartnett, Ann Isherwood, Wanda King, Anthony Lovell, Nyear Nazir, Mike Rouse, Mark Shurmer, David Thain and Jennifer Wheeler

Also Present:

Ms Liz Williams, Reach CIC

Officers:

Kevin Dicks, Clare Flanagan, Chris Forrester and Sue Hanley

Senior Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley

62. WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all those present to the meeting.

63. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Pattie Hill, Gemma Monaco, Gareth Prosser, Yvonne Smith and Craig Warhurst.

64. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Joanne Beecham declared a pecuniary interest in Minute Item No. 69, in respect of the Fees and Charges 2020/21 report, due to holding a license as an owner of a cattery. She advised that she would leave the room during consideration of that item.

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Chair

65. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of Council held on Monday 18th November 2019 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Mayor.

66. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following announcements were made:

a) The Mayor's Announcements

A list of civic engagements detailing the appointments that had been attended by the Mayor in December 2019 was circulated at the meeting.

The Mayor advised Members that he was due to attend the Special Olympics on Friday 24th January 2020. He had also arranged to hold a charity dinner on Saturday 4th April 2020 at Redditch Town Hall. Tickets would cost approximately £30 per person and all Members were welcome to attend.

b) The Leader's Announcements

The Leader informed Members that a submission had been made to the Government in the review of the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). A response was awaited to this submission.

c) The Chief Executive's Announcements

The Chief Executive confirmed that he had no announcements to make on this occasion.

67. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 9)

The Leader responded to a question that had been submitted by Ms L. Williams in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.2.

Ms Williams asked the following question of the Leader:

“Can the Leader confirm that as part of any support to the VCS agreed tonight that:

The properties currently let at a concessionary rent will be properly assessed for the actual commercial rentable value?

In light of the recently recommended decision:

(Executive Committee 19th December 2019) for the closure of all Council One Stop shops, where it is clearly stated that the Winyates OSS could be let for between £5,000 and £6,000 per annum. This is less than the 3 properties in Winyates Centre currently let to VCS organisations.”

The Leader responded as follows:

“I can confirm that all properties let by the Council are assessed in order to establish their appropriate commercial rent level.

Firstly the author of the report on the one stop shops was advised that the rental value for units at Winyates would be circa £7,000 to £7,500, but that the Council can look at a reduced rent or rent free period if we or the prospective tenant did work or fitting out to a unit before letting the property.

In this context the author recorded this in his report as an initial figure of £5,000 per annum rising to £7-7.5K per annum in subsequent years to show the predicted rental figures in different scenarios.

To be clear the full rent on the three Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) occupied units at Winyates which the question refers to are:

Unit 4 (Elim Trust) £5,800 agreed in 2014
Unit 9 (Reach) £6,500 agreed in 2015
Unit 12 (Reach) £6,000 agreed in 2015

All units at Winyates are of a similar size, except for Unit 5 (Convenience store) and Unit 10 (newsagent) which are larger and command higher rents accordingly and the most recent agreement was for Unit 2 at £7,500 per annum.

The reality is that for the shops at Winyates Centre, including any which become vacant, we would look for a rent of between £7,000 and £7,500 per annum as a minimum and it is likely that if these were to be assessed independently that this would result in the figures coming out as this or even higher.

It isn't possible to comment on any negotiated reductions as these are dependent on the works being undertaken.”

Ms Williams subsequently asked a supplementary question which asked the Leader whether he was certain that the Council would secure the rents quoted, given that the unit used by Reach CIC flooded each week.

The Leader responded by explained that Officers would respond to Ms Williams's supplementary question in due course with a written response.

68. MOTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 11)

There were no Motions on Notice for consideration at this meeting.

69. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The following items, arising from meetings of the Executive Committee held on 19th December 2019 and 14th January 2020, were discussed in detail at the meeting:

Review of the One Stop Shops

Members noted that the One Stop Shops had been the subject of a thorough review over a six month period. There were a limited number of customers who utilised the services available from the One Stop Shops and all of those customers who did access the service had been informed about the proposed closure and alternative service options.

During consideration of this item concerns were raised that the closure of the One Stop Shops could have a disproportionate impact on elderly and vulnerable residents. The One Stop Shops also attracted people to the district centres and concerns were raised that their closure could impact on the long-term viability of those district centres. However, it was suggested that support would be made available to effected customers to help limit the impact in the local community.

Finance Monitoring Report Quarter 2

Members discussed the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan for 2020/21 to 2023/24 and the budget challenges facing the Council moving forward. Following the external auditor's decision to issue the Section 24 Notice to the Council Officers had reviewed action that could be taken to increase income whilst reducing expenditure. During the 2019/20 financial year to date Officers had already identified £571,000 of savings and it was anticipated that further savings would be identified for subsequent years. Officers had also undertaken a review of the Council's Capital Programme for 2019/20 to 2022/23 and this reprofiling work would result in savings on borrowing costs for the Council.

Housing Revenue Account Rent Setting 2020/21

The report in respect of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Rent Setting for 2020/21 was discussed and Members noted that this was the first year in five years in which the Council had had an

opportunity to increase rents for Council tenants. For the previous four years the Council had been required by the Government to reduce rents by 1% per annum, which had had a detrimental impact on the Council's HRA.

Support to the Voluntary and Community Sector 2020/21

Members discussed the report in respect of support for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) 2020/21 in some detail and in doing so noted the following:

- The proposals detailed in the report and minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 14th January 2020, which would result in the introduction of a single budget to support VCS organisations.
- The total value of this budget at £175,000 each year over a three year period, which would encompass both grant funding and concessionary rent support to some VCS organisations.
- The proposed changes to the concessionary rents scheme over the three years, which would result in a phased reduction in the concessionary rent from 70% support in the first year, to 50% support in the second year and 20% support from the Council in the third year.
- The fact that this phased approach to providing concessionary rents support would provide VCS organisations that were affected by the changes with an opportunity to plan for the future.
- The fact that no decisions had yet been taken on the support that would be provided to VCS organisations in the fourth year.
- The impact that the reduction in support provided by the Council in concessionary rents as a proportion of the budget over those three years would have on the support available to VCS organisations in the form of grants from this budget.
- The nine VCS organisations in receipt of a concessionary rent. Members noted that there were more VCS organisations located in the Borough that did not receive this form of support from the Council.
- The proposed changes over the three years, which would provide the Council with an opportunity to review how the authority should provide support to VCS organisations in the future.
- The option available to the Council to help establish a Redditch Community Foundation in the future, which could be modelled on community foundations already in existence in other parts of the country.
- The need for Members to make difficult decisions in order to balance the Council's budget.
- The message that the proposed changes to supporting the sector might send to VCS organisations. Concerns were

raised that this might be viewed as indicating that the Council did not value the sector.

- The protests that had taken place in October 2019 when an original report had been issued. Members noted that changes had subsequently been made to the proposals before a decision had been requested from Council.
- The potential impact of a reduction in concessionary rents for VCS organisations and the possibility that some of the effected VCS organisations would subsequently close.
- The impact that the closure of VCS groups could have on some of the most vulnerable people in society if the services those groups provided were not replicated elsewhere.
- The extent to which the need to balance the Council's budget should result in a reduction in financial support available to VCS organisations.
- The Council's continuing support for VCS organisations in the future and the fact that in some cases this could be in a different form, such as through signposting VCS groups to alternative sources of funding.
- The consultation that had been undertaken with VCS groups, which had reported that they were in favour of an Officer-led Grants Panel.

During consideration of this item Councillor Hartnett proposed an amendment to the recommendation in respect of the Council's future support for VCS organisations. This amendment was seconded by Councillor Greg Chance.

The amendment proposed the following:

- “1) Council agrees to retain the current policy for concessionary rents scheme for the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- 2) Council agrees to end the current councillor community grants scheme and revert back to the grants panel of elected members for the distribution of grants which is now at £145k (£5,000 x 29 members) and to be distributed as previously to set criteria as set by the council and its priorities.
- 3) Council continue with and fund the £75k financial advice and problem solving contract.”

In proposing the amendment Councillor Hartnett commented that he felt his proposals would offer value for money for both the Council and VCS organisations. The proposal would result in retaining the status quo for the provision of concessionary rents to VCS organisations and return the Council to a grants programme whereby a Member-led Grants Panel would consider and determine grants applications. Councillor Hartnett also commented that it was important to retain a contract with an external organisation to

provide financial advice to residents funded at the same level as present due to concerns that demand for this service had not declined. In speaking on the amendment Councillor Hartnett also raised concerns that some VCS organisations in receipt of a concessionary rent from the Council would experience a 300% increase in their rent should changes occur and he questioned whether some of these group would be sustainable if they had to meet this cost. Councillor Hartnett suggested that for every £1 spent on VCS organisations the Council received £10 in value back. Members were asked to note that there was a lot of deprivation in Redditch, with 10 food banks in operation, and Councillor Hartnett raised concerns about what organisations would fill the gap in service delivery should local VCS organisations cease to operate due to a reduction in support. Councillor Hartnett concluded by noting that VCS organisations had been offered additional financial support in the form of public donations at the bonfire night celebrations and from the Redditch local lottery. However, as the Council had only received £400 in donations at the Bonfire Night celebrations in November 2019, half of which had been provided to the Mayor's charities, and the Council had only sold 341 tickets for the local lottery he suggested that these would not provide sufficient funding to support VCS organisations in Redditch.

In seconding the proposal Councillor Chance commented that the work of VCS organisations was needed more than ever at a time when need for support in the community was increasing. Councillor Chance noted that VCS organisations often supported some of the most disadvantaged people in society and could help to prevent residents from becoming more vulnerable. He expressed concerns that proposed changes to the support available to VCS organisations was being driven by the need for the Council to make difficult decisions to balance the authority's budget. Councillor Chance also expressed concerns that original proposals had been brought forward in the autumn in 2019 to remove concessionary rents from VCS organisations without consultation having been undertaken. Councillor Chance concluded by suggesting that it was not appropriate at this time to withdraw support from VCS groups.

Members subsequently discussed the following points in relation to the amendment:

- The financial difficulties experienced by many VCS organisations in relation to their core operational costs and the impact that changing the Council's concessionary rents and grants schemes might have on these groups.
- The discussions that had been held about the support for VCS groups at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9th January 2020 and the extent to which Members had supported a proposal that used similar wording to this amendment.

- The concept of the Big Society and the extent to which VCS organisations had assumed responsibility for delivering many local services that had previously been provided by statutory organisations.
- The sales numbers for the Redditch lottery. It was noted that this scheme had only recently been launched and high sales figures had not been anticipated in the first few months, though might increase over time to the benefit of local VCS organisations.
- The Councillor community grants scheme and the extent to which Members in all wards had spent their funding. Members noted that this funding could be spent over time and some applications would be approved in the first few months of 2020.

During consideration of this item a named vote was requested on the amendment in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 17.5.

Members voting FOR the amendment below:

Councillors Joe Baker, Debbie Chance, Greg Chance, John Fisher, Andrew Fry, Bill Hartnett, Wanda King, Mark Shurmer and Jenny Wheeler (9).

Members voting AGAINST the amendment below:

Councillors Salman Akbar, Tom Baker-Price, Joanne Beecham, Roger Bennett, Juliet Brunner, Michael Chalk, Brandon Clayton, Matt Dormer, Peter Fleming, Julian Grubb, Ann Isherwood, Anthony Lovell, Nyear Nazir, Mike Rouse and David Thain (15).

The amendment was therefore lost.

Councillor Joe Baker subsequently proposed an amendment in respect of the support provided by the Council to VCS groups. This amendment was seconded by Councillor Debbie Chance.

The amendment proposed the following:

“The Council remove the meanwhile type lease from option 5, as unanimously approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Thursday 9th January, 2020.”

In proposing the recommendation Councillor Baker commented that this had been discussed alongside other ideas at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 9th January 2020 when the Support to the Voluntary and Community Sector 2020/21 report had been pre-scrutinised by Members. This proposal had, however, been endorsed by the Committee, unlike the other proposals. Councillor Baker expressed concerns that the use of meanwhile leases would

impact on VCS organisations, which would not have the assurance of a secure tenancy.

In seconding the amendment Councillor Chance also expressed concerns about offering meanwhile leases to VCS organisations due to the impact that this could have on the future sustainability of those groups.

Members subsequently discussed the amendment and in doing so considered the following:

- The information in the report which indicated that the potential to use meanwhile leases would be assessed on a case by case basis.
- The flexibility provided to both VCS groups and the Council through using meanwhile leases.
- The consultation that had been undertaken with VCS organisations about the potential to use meanwhile leases. Members commented that some VS organisations had asked for meanwhile leases to be retained as an option.
- The work that the Council was undertaking in respect of the regeneration of the district centres and the flexibility that meanwhile leases would provide that would enable the Council to progress with these regeneration plans whilst also supporting VCS groups.

During consideration of this subject a named vote was requested on the amendment in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 17.5.

Members voting FOR the amendment below:

Councillors Joe Baker, Debbie Chance, Greg Chance, John Fisher, Andrew Fry, Bill Hartnett, Wanda King, Mark Shurmer and Jenny Wheeler (9).

Members voting AGAINST the amendment below:

Councillors Salman Akbar, Tom Baker-Price, Joanne Beecham, Roger Bennett, Juliet Brunner, Michael Chalk, Brandon Clayton, Matt Dormer, Peter Fleming, Julian Grubb, Ann Isherwood, Anthony Lovell, Nyear Nazir, Mike Rouse and David Thain (15).

The amendment was therefore lost.

Members subsequently considered the recommendations that had been proposed on this subject by the Executive Committee at the meeting held on 14th January 2020. During consideration of this matter a named vote was requested on the recommendation in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 17.5.

Members voting FOR the amendment below:

Councillors Salman Akbar, Tom Baker-Price, Joanne Beecham, Roger Bennett, Juliet Brunner, Michael Chalk, Brandon Clayton, Matt Dormer, Peter Fleming, Julian Grubb, Ann Isherwood, Anthony Lovell, Nyear Nazir, Mike Rouse and David Thain (15).

Members voting AGAINST the amendment below:

Councillors Joe Baker, Debbie Chance, Greg Chance, John Fisher, Andrew Fry, Bill Hartnett, Wanda King, Mark Shurmer and Jenny Wheeler (9).

The recommendation was therefore carried.

(During consideration of this report there was a brief adjournment from 7.53 to 7.58pm).

Council Tax Base 2020/21

The Mayor advised that no decision was required on this item at the meeting. There had been a typographical error in the report which had indicated that a Council decision was required but in fact the Executive Committee had had the authority to resolve the matter.

Fees and Charges 2020/21

Changes to the Council's fees and charges in 2020/21 were proposed. Members noted that the fees had been reviewed by Heads of Service and would enable the Council to cover the costs of delivering the service or provide the Council with greater flexibility in delivering the service.

Concerns were raised about the proposals detailed in the report to enable Officers employed in Leisure and Cultural Services to vary their fees by 20% and Bereavement Services by 25%. Furthermore, it was noted that in previous years attempts had been made to increase the fees for Bereavement Services and these increases had been reversed. However, Members also noted that the ability to vary fees for these services would provide officers in those departments with greater flexibility to act in a commercial manner.

Reference was made to the increases in fees for Dial a Ride and Shopmobility Services. Members noted that a single journey on a Dial A Ride service was increasing in cost by 53.85% and the concessionary fees for the service by 42.86%. Meanwhile, fees for Shopmobility would be increasing by between 30 and 70%.

During consideration of this item Members noted that a number of mistakes had been identified in relation to fees for some of the

Council's Housing Services. An additional recommendation in respect of these fees was presented at the meeting for Members' consideration and this was approved.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Thursday 19th December 2019 be received and all recommendations adopted; and
- 2) the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday 14th January 2020 be received and all recommendations adopted, subject to including the following additional resolution in respect of minute Item No. 91 Fees and Charges 2020/21:

the charges detailed in the table below are implemented on 1st April 2020.

Service Category	Charge 1st April 2019	% Change	increase/ decrease	Proposed charge from 2020
	£		£	£
<u>Service Charges</u>				
Three Storey Flats*	7.50	4.00%	0.00	7.80
Woodrow Estate	3.90	2.56%	0.00	4.00
Evesham Mews	6.50	3.08%	0.00	6.70
<u>Sheltered Scheme (VAT inclusive)</u>				
Use of washing machines - per load	2.70	11.11%	0.30	3.00

70. URGENT BUSINESS - RECORD OF DECISIONS

The Leader explained that there had been one urgent decision taken since the previous meeting of Council. This decision had been taken in respect of funding for the refurbishment and property works of the Pitcheroak Golf Club Catering Service. The funding requested had been £103,000 for inclusion in the capital programme for 2019/20. The decision had had to be taken urgently to enable the site to be opened as soon as possible.

71. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

There was no general urgent business for consideration on this occasion.