

Council

Monday, 20 July 2020

MINUTES

Present:

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

Officers:

Kevin Dicks, Claire Felton, Sue Hanley, Jayne Pickering, Guy Revans and Judith Willis

Senior Democratic Services Officers:

Jess Bayley and Amanda Scarce

15. WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all present to the meeting and explained how the meeting would proceed in a virtual environment.

16. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Wanda King.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

18. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of Annual Council held on Monday 22nd June 2020 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Mayor.

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Chair

19. ANNOUNCEMENTS

a) The Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor advised that he had attended one civic engagement since the Annual Council meeting. At this engagement, which took place on 4th July 2020, the Mayor had opened the Redditch Borough Community Sports and Social Club in Batchley. There was the possibility that the Mayor would be attending the scarecrow judging competition in Church Hill in August 2020.

b) The Leader's Announcements

The Leader advised that he had circulated a list of his announcements prior to the meeting. This highlighted that the Leader had attended a range of strategic meetings since the Annual Council meeting, including meetings of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Board, the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise (GBSLEP) Recovery Task Force and the Worcestershire Members' Local Engagement in Outbreaks Board.

c) Chief Executive's Announcements

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

20. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 9)

The Mayor confirmed that there were no Questions on Notice for consideration at this meeting.

21. MOTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 11)

Covid-19

Councillor Matthew Dormer proposed a Motion in respect of Covid-19 and the response of various agencies to the pandemic. This Motion was seconded by Councillor Bill Hartnett.

In proposing the Motion Councillor Dormer commented that Covid-19 had had a negative impact on the Borough. He thanked staff working for the NHS, pharmacies, key workers, local volunteers and Council staff for all their hard work during the lockdown and for the efforts that had been made to tackle the impact of the virus in the Borough.

In seconding the Motion Councillor Hartnett advised that there had been plans to propose this Motion in the spring, though the lockdown had resulted in a delay. Councillor Hartnett commented

that during the lockdown there had been a number of tragedies which had impacted on people living in the local community. He welcomed the acts of kindness, support and courage that had been evident amongst NHS staff, key workers, pharmacies, supermarket staff and local volunteers and he thanked them for their hard work. The Motion provided Members with an opportunity to thank all residents and businesses for their efforts during the lockdown. Thanks were also extended to local community groups that had helped people who were self-isolating as well as Council staff for their hard work.

Members subsequently discussed the Motion in detail and in doing so noted the following:

- The hard work of the emergency services during the lockdown, particularly NHS staff.
- The contributions that had been made by Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) groups and volunteers during the lockdown. Specific reference was made to groups such as the Batchley Support Group, Church Hill Together, the Support Redditch Emergency Network and the Astwood Bank Neighbours group.
- The personal impact that the pandemic had had on some Members in respect of their families and the work of NHS staff and key workers to support Covid-19 patients and vulnerable people.
- The hard work of Council staff during the lockdown, which had ensured that essential services continued to be delivered to residents throughout the crisis.
- The actions of Redditch residents, whose compliance with social distancing and lockdown rules had ensured that the number of cases of Covid-19 diagnosed in the Borough had been lower than some other parts of the country.
- The emotional and physical impact that the Covid-19 pandemic had had on people and the action that had been taken to support people during this time.
- The benefits of multi-agency working during the lockdown.
- The support that had been provided by the West Midlands Ambulance Trust to vulnerable patients.
- The work of Worcestershire Hearts of Joy in respect of delivering food parcels in the community.
- The challenges for teachers in terms of educating pupils during the lockdown and the impact that the pandemic had had on young people.

RESOLVED that

this Council recognises the Coronavirus epidemic as a major public health incident that is adversely impacting the residents and businesses of the Borough.

In responding to the crisis, Council records its sincere thanks to the NHS, our Council's officers, emergency service workers, supermarket staff, community groups and the countless volunteers across Redditch who have provided relief and aid to our valued communities.

Council also acknowledges the work of the Council's frontline staff, colleagues and volunteers.

22. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The following matters were discussed during consideration of the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday, 9th June 2020.

a) Anti-Social Behaviour Policy

Members discussed the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and noted that the policy raised the potential for mediation to be used to tackle anti-social behaviour in the community. There were financial implications to the use of mediation, but assurances had been provided to Members about how the costs would be covered.

During consideration of this matter questions were raised about the extent to which the terms set out in the policy could be applied in cases where the anti-social behaviour involved people living in private accommodation. Members noted that in cases where a Council tenant was involved, the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Officers could provide support, but this was not the case for private residents. There was general consensus that this matter should be explored further, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement, outside the meeting.

b) Bring Your Own Device Policy

Members noted that the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) Policy would help to improve the Council's ICT support to elected Councillors. All Members had been working on Council ipads in recent years, but the equipment was relatively old and the functionality was not as good as other equipment. Whilst Members were holding meetings virtually the challenges posed by the equipment had become evident. New equipment would be purchased using funding from the Government's Covid-19 budget allocation to the Council. The BYOD Policy would provide Members with access to their own IT equipment with an opportunity to access Council business electronically using more up to date and user-friendly equipment.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday, 9th June 2020 be received and all recommendations adopted.

23. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Joe Baker, presented the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for the 2019/20 municipal year.

During the presentation of the report Councillor Baker highlighted the following points for Members' consideration:

- The recommendations that had been made by the Committee during the year had tended to be cross-party and were based on the evidence that had been gathered by Members.
- New Government guidance in respect of Overview and Scrutiny had been published in May 2019 and Members had welcomed news that the Council was already compliant with a lot of the best practice detailed in this document.
- The Committee had an important role holding the Executive Committee to account for decisions that were taken and acted as a critical friend.
- Scrutiny investigations focused on issues that mattered to the local community and provided a voice for local residents and other stakeholders.
- There had been a number of occasions during the year when the Committee had pre-scrutinised reports prior to a decision being taken by the Executive Committee.
- A whole range of subjects had been scrutinised in 2019/20 including the new tenancy handbook, the changes to concessionary rents, funding for VCS groups and the regeneration of the town centre.
- The Budget Scrutiny Working Group and Performance Scrutiny Working Group had investigated the Council's financial position and the performance of the authority's services. Councillors Wheeler and Fry, the Chairs of these respective groups, were thanked for their hard work during the year.
- There had been detailed investigations of parking enforcement and suicide prevention and both of these exercises had now been completed.
- Councillor Baker thanked all Members who had served on the Committee, scrutiny Task Groups and working groups, for their work in 2019/20.
- In particular, Councillor Baker thanked the former Vice Chair of the Committee, Councillor Debbie Chance, for her help

during the year and also thanked Councillor Joanne Beecham who had stood down from the Committee. He welcomed Councillors Pattie Hill and Ann Isherwood who had replaced them on the Committee for 2020/21.

- Thanks were also extended to the Senior Democratic Services Officer for Redditch and the Democratic Services Officer for their hard work in support of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the year.

Following the presentation of the report, the Leader of the Council expressed his gratitude for the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the various scrutiny groups during the year. It was noted that every recommendation that had been made by the Budget Scrutiny Working Group in 2019/20 had been approved and this work was welcomed by the Executive Committee.

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2019/20 be noted.

24. OUTSIDE BODY APPOINTMENTS

Members discussed the following appointments to outside bodies.

- a) Armed Forces Champion - Worcestershire Armed Forces Covenant Partnership

Councillor Matthew Dormer nominated Councillor Julian Grubb for the position of Armed Forces Champion. This nomination was seconded by Councillor Mike Rouse.

In proposing Councillor Grubb for the position, it was noted that he had been on active service in Iraq during the Gulf War and had experience in the Territorial Army.

During consideration of this item Councillor Bill Hartnett nominated Councillor Joe Baker for the position of Armed Forces Champion. This nomination was seconded by Councillor Greg Chance.

In proposing Councillor Baker to the position, it was noted that he had built up a rapport with the armed forces when serving as the Mayor of the Borough of Redditch.

On being put to the vote Councillor Baker's nomination to the position of Armed Forces Champion was lost.

- b) Worcestershire Local Transport Board

Members were advised that the positions of lead member and substitute member on the Worcestershire Local Transport

Board were shared by Redditch Borough Council with Bromsgrove District and Wyre Forest District Councils. In this context, Councillors Adam Kent (Bromsgrove District Council) and Fran Oborski (Wyre Forest District Council) had been nominated for the positions of lead Member and substitute Member on the Board respectively.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Councillor Julian Grubb be appointed Armed Forces Champion on the Worcestershire Armed Forces Covenant Partnerships for the 2020/21 municipal year; and**
- 2) Councillors Adam Kent, from Bromsgrove District Council, and Fran Oborski, from Wyre Forest District Council, be appointed lead member and substitute member on the Worcestershire Local Transport Board in the 2020/21 municipal year.**

25. URGENT BUSINESS - RECORD OF DECISIONS

The Mayor advised that there had been one urgent decision taken since the meeting of Annual Council held on 22nd June 2020. This urgent decision had been taken in response to the Business and Planning Act 2020 as it had been necessary for the Council to start to consider applications under the provisions in this act by the time that the legislation received Royal Assent, which was anticipated in July 2020.

26. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

The Mayor confirmed that there was no urgent business for consideration on this occasion.

27. RENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The Head of Community and Housing Services presented a report in respect of a proposed new Rent Management System for the Council. Members were advised that during the Covid-19 pandemic a lot of Council tenants had been furloughed or made redundant, whilst residents working on zero hours contracts had found that their working hours had reduced significantly. This had impacted on many tenants' ability to pay their rent which in turn had financial implications for the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

Officers were proposing that a new Rent Management System should be introduced to enable the Council to mitigate the risks arising from the reduction in rent payments. There would be a need to ensure that the new system could be integrated with the new Housing IT system and this requirement would be built into the Council's procurement process. The new system would help to

reduce the amount of paperwork Officers had to complete and thereby provide staff with the time to concentrate on working with vulnerable residents in respect of developing debt management plans. The system would therefore have a beneficial impact on tenants.

The Council would need to invest capital spending in order to procure the Rent Management System. Officers were anticipating that this cost would be offset in the long-term by potential revenue savings. The capital funding would be provided from within existing capital reserves in the HRA.

Following the presentation of the report Members discussed a number of points in detail:

- The reasons why this report had not previously been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny and Executive Committees. Members noted that due to the financial implications for both tenants and the Council there was a need to act with some urgency.
- The impact that debt could have on a person's emotional resilience and the value of people receiving support from the Council to enable them to manage their debts moving forward.
- The hard work that had been undertaken by Officers working in the Housing Department in recent months as the level of rent debts amongst Council tenants had increased.
- The potential for the cost of the system to be covered using funding provided to the Council to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. Officers explained that it would not be possible to use funding from that budget for this purpose.
- The potential for the Rent Management System to integrate with the new Financial Services IT system.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the capital programme for 2020/21 for the Housing Project is increased by £65k to be funded from existing reserves; and**
- 2) delegation is given to the Head of Environment and Housing Property Services and the Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services to procure a suitable provider for implementation.**