

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 4 August 2020

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), Councillor Mike Rouse (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Greg Chance, Brandon Clayton, Bill Hartnett, Anthony Lovell, Nyear Nazir, David Thain and Craig Warhurst

Also Present:

Councillor Debbie Chance, Chair of the Suicide Prevention Task Group

Officers:

Derek Allen, Kevin Dicks, Mike Dunphy, Claire Felton, Sue Hanley, Jayne Pickering, Guy Revans and Sarah Sellers

Senior Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mike Rouse declared a pecuniary interest in Minute Item No. 9 – Overview and Scrutiny Committee Minutes – due to his role as a trustee of the Support Redditch Emergency Network, a group that was eligible to receive funding from the Council's community lottery. Councillor Craig Warhurst also declared a pecuniary interest as a Committee member for the Astwood Bank Carnival, which similarly eligible to receive funding from the community lottery. Consequently, they both left the meeting during consideration of Item 9, which detailed a recommendation in respect of the community lottery and they did not take part in the debate or the vote thereon.

3. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader advised that the Additional Papers 1 pack for the meeting contained an extract from the minutes of the meeting of the

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Chair

Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 30th July 2020 when Members had considered the Suicide Prevention Task Group's final report. It had not been possible to include this minute extract in the main agenda as the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting had taken place after publication of the agenda for the Executive Committee meeting.

Members were advised that an extra item, at Minute Item No. 12 – Urgent Business – Possible E-scooter Trial in Redditch - had been published in an Additional Papers 2 pack. The Chair had agreed that this urgent business should be included on the agenda, following consultation with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as in order to participate in a national bid process for E-scooters, the Council would need to submit an entry by 31st August 2020 and there were no further meetings of the Executive Committee scheduled to take place before that date.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday, 9th June 2020 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. SUICIDE PREVENTION TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT

The Chair of the Suicide Prevention Task Group, Councillor Debbie Chance, presented the group's final report. Members were advised that this had been a sensitive and complex issue to review and Councillor Chance thanked the other five members of the group for their assistance with the investigation.

There had been a slight delay in terms of the presentation of the group's findings to the Overview and Scrutiny and Executive Committees due to the Covid-19 pandemic. During the review the group had held 11 meetings and spoken to eight witnesses, both Council Officers and external partners, between June 2019 and June 2020.

The group had learned a lot about the impact that deaths by suicide could have on people's friends and families. Members had discovered that bereaved relatives who had lost a loved one to suicide were at higher risk of death by suicide. A concerning finding had been that many of the deaths were amongst persons not previously known to mental health services, or who had not confided in anyone that they were struggling.

Members had been advised that on average one person died each week as a result of suicide in Worcestershire. In Redditch, for the three-year period from 2015 to 2017, there were 26 deaths by suicide of which 84% were among men.

The investigation had primarily focused on services that were not provided by Redditch Borough Council. Members had reviewed the content of the Worcestershire Suicide Prevention Plan and had been greatly assisted by the county's Public Health team.

The group's recommendations focused mainly on the Council's influencing role. Key objectives of the review had been to review suicide in general and the mental health services available to Redditch residents. This had taken into account services provided by both public sector organisations and the valuable contribution of Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations.

The witnesses interviewed by the group had highlighted the need for awareness raising and training and this was reflected in the recommendations. The group were also guided by the Equalities Team to look at how the Council's Equalities Strategy could be updated to include actions that supported suicide prevention. The other recommendations covered the assistance that could be provided to VCS groups to enable those bodies to better publicise their services and generally promoting awareness around suicide prevention.

Following the presentation of the report Members discussed the group's findings and recommendations. Members noted that the report had been dedicated to Mr Mike Lewington, who had been interviewed during the review and had sadly passed away since then. Members also noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had endorsed the group's recommendations unanimously.

Reference was made to the suicides that had occurred in Redditch in recent years, particularly at Musketts Bridge and Members noted that messages of hope that had been secured to the bridge had subsequently been removed. Borough and County Councillors had been working hard in recent years to support people experiencing mental health difficulties and the group's findings would help to inform elected Members about action that could be taken to prevent suicide moving forward.

During consideration of this item Councillor Mike Rouse proposed an additional recommendation. This additional recommendation was seconded by Councillor Matthew Dormer. The additional recommendation proposed the following:

“Officers be tasked with sending a copy of the Suicide Prevention Task Group’s final report to Worcestershire County Council and the Member of Parliament for Redditch.”

In proposing this recommendation Councillor Rouse commented that it was important for the Worcestershire Suicide Prevention Plan Group and the Worcestershire Health and Wellbeing Board to learn about the group’s findings. This could be achieved by sending a copy of the report to relevant Members and Officers at Worcestershire County Council. In addition, the local Member of Parliament would find the information useful.

There was general consensus amongst Members that this additional recommendation would be helpful.

RESOLVED that

- 1) that the Redditch Borough Council Equalities Strategy should reflect the Council’s commitment to suicide prevention and supporting good mental health, and that in producing the updated version of the Equalities Strategy for 2020 to 2024 objectives and actions should be included to cover the following:**
 - a) that officers continue to publicise messages around positive mental health to staff and promote opportunities to participate in training and events;**
 - b) that officers develop the signposting information available on the intranet to support staff in being able to signpost either service users or colleagues to the relevant support services;**
 - c) that officers mark suicide prevention awareness day in September 2020 including using this as an opportunity to promote the work of local groups that support suicide prevention;**
 - d) recognising that not all staff may undertake the Mental Health First Aid training, that officers arrange for some alternative web based training resources to be provided for staff, to be aimed at those working in front line posts;**
- 2) that officers from the Communications Team work with the Partnership Manager to identify local voluntary sector organisation which offer support around mental health and wellbeing and/ or promote suicide prevention;**

- 3) that the organisations identified be invited to participate in workshop training sessions to be provided by the Communications Team to help them to better publicise the support and services their organisations provide through use of social media and other publicity;
 - 4) that officers be tasked with publicising the outcome of the Task Group in the Wellbeing in Partnership Newsletter and by giving details of the findings to the Worcestershire Suicide Prevention Plan Partnership Group (sub-group of the Health and Well-being Board); and
 - 5) Officers be tasked with sending a copy of the Suicide Prevention Task Group's final report to Worcestershire County Council and the Member of Parliament for Redditch.
6. **AMENITY STANDARDS DOCUMENT FOR PRIVATELY RENTED PROPERTIES IN REDDITCH**

The Housing Strategy Manager presented a report in respect of the Council's proposed amenity standards for private sector housing in Redditch. Members were advised that there were over 4,000 rented properties in the private sector in Redditch, which included Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs). The amenity standards policy would help local landlords and tenants to understand the minimum standards expected for local properties in the private rented sector.

The Council had based the content of the amenity standards document on key guidelines in legislation in respect of expected standards for the private rented sector. Members were asked to note that the majority of local landlords provided good quality private sector housing to tenants. However, there were some landlords who did not comply with expected standards and there might be times when the Council would need to take action against these landlords.

Members subsequently discussed the report and in doing so commented on the importance of deterring homelessness and ensuring that people were housed in good quality properties. There was a particular risk that the standards might not be met for HMOs and the document set out expectations for these properties as well as a definition of what constituted an HMO. Officers advised that the updates to the document since 2015 included reference to more recent legislative requirements, including in respect of fire safety and minimum bedroom sizes.

Reference was made to the need for enforcement action to be taken against landlords who did not comply with the minimum standards. Members also commented that it was important to ensure that tenants were informed about their rights and the minimum standards that they could expect from a property in the private rented sector.

During consideration of this item the following matters were queried:

- The fact that this was a joint amenity standards document for Redditch Borough and Bromsgrove District Council and the stage in the process that had been reached in the district. Officers explained that the Bromsgrove Cabinet would consider the report at a meeting on Thursday, 6th August 2020.
- The reason why the Council had a joint Amenity Standards document with Bromsgrove District Council. The Committee was informed that due to the geographical location of Redditch Borough and Bromsgrove District close to one another there were landlords who owned properties in both areas and it was therefore useful to have a joint policy to ensure a consistent approach.
- The action that could be taken by the Council if a landlord breached the minimum standards required.
- The extent to which consultation had been undertaken in respect of the proposed changes. Officers confirmed that consultation had not taken place.
- The arrangements for inspections and whether the Council had a schedule of inspection. Officers confirmed that there was a schedule and agreed to provide this information to Members outside the meeting.
- The process that would be in place to enable residents to raise breaches of the minimum standards with the Council.
- The action that would be taken by Officers if the minimum standards for properties in the private rented sector were breached by a landlord.
- The extent to which some landlords might be difficult to contact. Officers confirmed that this could sometimes be problematic, though the Council had access to a database of all HMO landlords.
- The potential for the database for HMO landlords to be shared with the Council's out of hours teams for use in the event of an emergency. Members were advised that this would be investigated further, following consultation with the Council's Information Management Team regarding the potential data protection implications.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the Amenity Standards Policy be adopted; and**
- 2) the Head of Community and Housing Services be delegated authority to update and amend the Amenity Standards Policy, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement.**

7. CREATION OF JOINT WORCESTERSHIRE AND HEREFORDSHIRE WASTE PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY OFFICER

The Head of Environmental and Housing Property Services presented a report in respect of the proposed creation of a Joint Herefordshire and Worcestershire Waste Partnership Strategy Officer.

During the presentation of the report the following matters were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- The Government had been reviewing national waste collection and disposal services and was proposing a number of changes. The final details remained to be confirmed as the legislation had not yet been agreed and would be subject to further consultation.
- At present each local authority had a significant amount of flexibility to determine local service delivery arrangements and there were a number of differences between local authority areas in respect of arrangement for waste collection and delivery.
- The Government had been consulting on a range of options that would result in greater consistency across the country in terms of waste services.
- As part of this process the Government was considering requiring Councils to provide garden waste services to residents for free and the potential requirement for all Councils to introduce a food waste collection service.
- Initial proposals to require Councils to have weekly waste collection services, rather than the fortnightly waste collection service that was in place in Redditch, were not being pursued further by the Government.
- However, should the changes suggested by the Government come into effect this would result in a loss of income of approximately £40,000 from the garden waste collection service and a potential increase in costs of waste collection services by approximately £580,000.
- Redditch Borough Council had worked with other Councils in Herefordshire and Worcestershire for a number of years on a

- Joint Municipal Waste Strategy and Waste Partnership. This helped to ensure consistency in local service delivery.
- The Councils in Herefordshire and Worcestershire were aiming to work together to respond to the Government consultation process and to ensure consistency in the delivery of any future additional services required, such as the food waste collection service.
 - The proposed postholder would co-ordinate this work on behalf of the local authorities in Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

After the report had been presented the following issues were discussed in more detail:

- The Government review of waste delivery services and the fact that any changes would represent the most significant alteration to the delivery of waste services since 2007.
- The need for the Councils in Herefordshire and Worcestershire to work together to ensure consistency in service delivery locally.
- The requirement for Councils to introduce a food waste collection service by 2023, under the Government's proposals, and the resource implications of this requirement for the Council.
- The risk that a food waste collection service would encourage an increase in the amount of waste that each household disposed of during a month.
- The need for residents to be educated about waste collection services, particularly any new services that the Council might be required to introduce in the future.
- The potential challenge for Councils locally in respect of storage for food waste.
- The food that would need to be collected in a potential food waste collection service. The Committee was informed that this would need to include cooked food, meat and foodstuffs that could have been composted.
- The size of the bin that would be used for a food waste collection service. Members were advised that these would be relatively small 25 litre bins.
- The amount of food waste that tended to be collected nationally. The Committee was informed that the average weight of the food waste collected per household was 2.5 to 4.5 kilos per week.
- The penalties that could be issued to residents who did not dispose of food waste correctly. Members were advised that information had not yet been provided about whether Councils could issue penalties or the nature of those penalties.

- The challenge that some residents would encounter when trying to accommodate an extra bin for the disposal of food waste.
- The joint communications plan that had been proposed for Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Officers confirmed that Redditch Borough Council would be joining other local Councils in support of this plan.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) Redditch Borough Council agree to the establishment of a Joint Waste Strategy Officer to work on behalf of the partnership of all 8 Local Authorities in Herefordshire and Worcestershire;**
- 2) Redditch Borough Council allocates £8,000 per annum for a fixed term of three years; and**
- 3) Redditch Borough Council will consider requests for additional funding to support further work which may be identified and proposed via the partnership Senior Waste Officer Group.**

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19

The Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Resources presented a report in respect of the financial implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for the Council.

Members were advised that Covid-19 had had a particular impact on income to the Council from services. There had been more limited cost implications for the Council, though there had had to be investment in Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and new IT equipment for staff.

The Council was required to provide an update to the Government every month in respect of the financial position of the authority. This had started in April 2020 and data had continued to be collected throughout the lockdown. The loss of income over time had been taken into account, though circumstances kept changing which meant that it was difficult to provide accurate forecasts about future positions based on this data. The economy nationally had not responded as anticipated since elements of the lockdown had been lifted and this had contributed to further uncertainty. Locally, this, combined with the lockdown, had resulted in a reduction in income from business rates.

Officers were anticipating that the Council would not receive the level of income that had been expected from Rubicon Leisure Ltd

when the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) had been set for the 2020/21 financial year. The Council was anticipating a potential loss of £850,000 income from the company, though the position might change within the next few months. The Council owned the company, so the authority had responsibility for any of the organisation's liabilities. The financial costs of delivering Leisure Services was proving problematic for many district Councils, including those authorities which had outsourced services to private sector organisations.

The Shareholders Committee had met on 3rd August 2020 to discuss the financial position of Rubicon Leisure Ltd. There had been some good news, including that 84 per cent of the membership of the Abbey Stadium had been retained during the lockdown, income from golf services had tripled during the period and there had been an increase in income from the stadium. Social distancing measures had been put in place at all of the leisure facilities managed by the company.

There had been a decrease in the amount of Council Tax that had been paid during the lockdown. Some residents had deferred payments until later in the year so the real impact in lost income from Council Tax would not become apparent until later in the financial year. The Council only received approximately 12 per cent of the Council Tax funds; the fall in revenue from Council Tax would have a greater impact on Worcestershire County Council's financial position as that authority was the main recipient of Council Tax.

At the start of the lockdown there had been concerns about the position of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). However, a dedicated team had been working in respect of rent arrears and the position of the budget was improving.

To date the Council had received just over £1 million from the Government in response to the financial impact of Covid-19. Further funding was being made available nationally by the government for the arts. Unfortunately, Forge Mill Needle Museum would not be eligible to apply for funding, though the Palace Theatre would be eligible. Additional funding for Leisure and Cultural Services was expected from the Government moving forward.

The external auditors had been kept informed about the financial impact of Covid-19 on the Council. Officers had clearly communicated the Council's expectation that the impact of Covid-19 would not be taken into account by the auditors when assessing whether the Section 24 Notice should remain in place for the authority.

Following the presentation of the report Members discussed the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's finances. Reference was made to the different figures that had been included in the report in respect of planning and Officers noted that the Council would not necessarily lose all of the income quoted as being at risk for this department. Members also questioned the basis for the figures that had been quoted in respect of potential financial losses for taxi licensing and Lifeline services and Officers explained that these were based on estimates.

During consideration of this matter Members paid tribute to the hard work of the Financial Services team, particularly the Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Resources and the Head of Financial and Customer Services. Members noted that the team's response to the Covid-19 pandemic had occurred at a time when officers were already working hard to address the issues that had been raised by the external auditors in the Section 24 Notice. Members also praised all staff for their hard work during the lockdown and for ensuring that frontline services had continued to be delivered. The hard work of staff employed by Rubicon Leisure Ltd was also praised and Members noted that the company had encountered unprecedented circumstances in the first 18 months of operation.

Reference was made to the financial challenges facing the Council, in respect of the Section 24 Notice as well as the impact of Covid-19. As a consequence, it was noted that Members would need to review the Council Plan and it was possible that difficult decisions would need to be taken in order to ensure that the Council had a balanced budget moving forward.

RESOLVED that

the projected budgetary impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic outlined in this report and related actions, both taken so far and planned for the future, be noted.

9. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Senior Democratic Services Officer (Redditch) explained that at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 2nd July 2020 Members had considered a report in respect of the Council lottery. This report had been designed to focus on the impact of the Council lottery in the first six months since it had been launched. Based on the information provided in the report and subsequent debate the Committee had proposed a recommendation on the subject of the Council lottery for the Executive Committee's consideration.

Members discussed an extract from the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 2nd July 2020 which detailed the debate in respect of the Council lottery. Reference was made to the additional information that had been requested by the Committee and Officers explained that further information would be provided to the Committee at a later date as a further update report had been requested.

During consideration of this item Councillor Bill Hartnett proposed the recommendation that had been submitted by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This was seconded by Councillor Greg Chance.

The recommendation proposed the following:

“the Executive Committee review the financial implications to the Council in terms of costs and viability of continuing with the Redditch Community Lottery.”

The proposal was subsequently discussed and the following points were noted during the debate:

- The timing of the recommendation and the extent to which it was fair to request an assessment of the financial implications of the lottery when the service had been in operation for less than a year.
- The fact that the first six months of the lottery had coincide with the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact that this might have had on residents' capacity to participate in the lottery.
- The value of being open and transparent in respect of all Council services and the potential for a review of the Council lottery to help the authority to achieve this.
- The potential for the effectiveness of the lottery to be reviewed at a later date once the service had been in place for some time.

On being put to the vote the proposal was lost.

(During consideration of this item Councillor Mike Rouse declared a pecuniary interest due to his role as a trustee of the Support Redditch Emergency Network, a group that was eligible to receive funding from the Council lottery. Councillor Craig Warhurst also declared a pecuniary interest as a Committee member for the Astwood Bank Carnival, which was similarly eligible to receive funding from the Council lottery. Consequently, they both left the meeting during consideration of this item and they did not take part in the debate or vote thereon).

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

The Chair confirmed that there were no further recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or any other Committee for consideration on this occasion.

11. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

The following updates were provided on the work of Executive Advisory Panels and other related groups.

a) Climate Change Cross Party Working Group – Chair, Councillor Anthony Lovell

Councillor Lovell explained that there had been no meetings of the Climate Change Cross Party Working Group since the previous meeting of the Executive Committee, though he anticipated that a meeting would take place shortly. Officers were in the process of circulating questionnaires amongst members of the public. Councillor Lovell thanked Councillor Andrew Fry, as the Shadow Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, for his support.

During consideration of this update a question was raised about the achievements of the group in its first year of operation and whether an annual report would be prepared for the 2019/20 municipal year. In responding, Councillor Brandon Clayton, Chair of the group in the 2019/20 municipal year, noted that it was not standard practice to provide annual reports for any of the Executive Advisory Panels but a summary of the group's work would be requested from officers.

b) Constitutional Review Working Party – Chair, Councillor Matthew Dormer

Councillor Dormer advised that a meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Party (CRWP) was scheduled to take place on 3rd November 2020.

c) Corporate Parenting Board – Council Representative, Councillor Nyear Nazir

Councillor Nazir explained that she had attended the latest meeting of the Board. During the meeting Members had discussed an independent review of contact with young people during the pandemic. Risks were being reviewed and a

Return to School Plan assessed. The position of children and young people in care had also been discussed.

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

Councillor Dormer commented that a meeting of the Member Support Steering Group was scheduled to take place on 6th October 2020.

e) Planning Advisory Panel – Chair, Councillor Matthew Dormer

Members were advised that no meetings of the Planning Advisory Panel were scheduled to take place.

12. URGENT BUSINESS - POSSIBLE E-SCOOTER TRIAL IN REDDITCH

The Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager presented a report in respect of the potential for Redditch to take part in a national E-scooter trial. The subject of e-scooters was being investigated by the Government as part of a focus on sustainable transport.

Worcestershire County Council would provide some assistance to Redditch Borough Council in respect of the bid for Redditch but were not taking a lead on the project. Consequently, external advice had been sought by Officers. At this initial stage of the project the Council needed to determine how the trial could operate in Redditch in general terms. At a later stage, subject to the authority's submission being successful, the Council would need to procure an external provider to deliver the trial in Redditch over a 12-month period. Redditch Borough Council would need to submit the bid to the Department for Transport (DfT) for approval and the department would determine whether Redditch would participate in the trial.

Officers were proposing that the e-scooter trial should take place in parts of Redditch town centre. Should the Council's bid be successful there would be approximately 100 e-scooters during the trial. The Council would need to address certain requirements in respect of traffic regulations prior to the launch of a trial. The external provider of the service would be responsible for maintaining the e-scooters and would need to obtain a license to operate. Should the trial be launched and be successful, the Council could consider extending the service to other parts of the Borough.

The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) would also be submitting a bid to participate in the trial. There was the possibility that, if Redditch Borough Council's bid was unsuccessful, Redditch might be selected by the WMCA if the combined authority was successful, as a location for the trial.

After the presentation of the report Members discussed the following points in detail:

- The benefits of encouraging residents to use sustainable methods of transport, both in terms of the climate change implications and for people's physical health.
- The potential implications of an e-scooter trial for people with physical disabilities, particularly residents who were blind or partially sighted. The Committee was informed that the e-scooters emitted a noise and were not permitted to travel on footpaths, which would help to ensure the safety of pedestrians.
- The recent press coverage in respect of e-scooters and sustainable transport in Redditch.
- The amount of revenue that the Council could expect to generate from the service. Officers explained that it would be difficult to predict potential revenue prior to the trial taking place. There had only been one e-scooter trial to date in north England so there was not sufficient data available nationally to enable an estimate to be provided at this stage. Data would only begin to emerge once a trial had been launched.
- The role of Worcestershire County Council in respect of the transport infrastructure in the county and the need for partnership working in respect of the Active Travel agenda for Worcestershire.
- The highways infrastructure in Redditch and the benefits of a new town layout for sustainable transport trials.
- The speed limit for e-scooters, at 15.5 miles per hour. Officers confirmed that e-scooters would only be permitted to travel on roads where there was a 30 miles per hour speed limit.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Officers be authorised to submit a bid for an e-scooter trial to the Department for Transport on or around the 31st August 2020; and**
- 2) subject to the Council's bid to take part in the e-scooter trial being successful, authority be delegated to the Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services and the Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services to complete all related legal and administrative documentation.**

(This report had been accepted as a matter of Urgent Business – not on the Executive Committee Work Programme and not having met the publication deadline – and was considered at the meeting as such, with the approval of the Chair and the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in accordance with the Council’s constitutional rules and the powers vested in the Chair by virtue of Section 100 (B) (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972 to agree to matters of urgency being discussed by reason of special circumstances.

In this case the special circumstances were that the Council needed to submit a bid to the Government for consideration as a location for an e-scooter trial by 31st August 2020. As there were no further meetings of the Executive Committee scheduled to take place prior to that date the Chair had agreed that the item could be discussed by the Committee as a matter of urgency.)

13. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that

under S.100 I of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following matters on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12 (A) of the said Act, as amended.

Financial Outturn Report 2019/20 and Reserves (Minute Item No. 14)

14. FINANCIAL OUTTURN 2019/20 AND RESERVES

The Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Resources presented the Council’s Financial Outturn Report 2019/20 and Reserves and in so doing highlighted the following information for Members’ consideration:

- The report had been presented to the Executive Committee slightly later in the calendar year than usual due to delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The majority of services were underspent when compared to the budget that had been set in the MTFP for the financial year.
- In part, these savings could be explained because the MTFP had been agreed before the Section 24 Notice had been issued to the Council and therefore significant changes had been made since the budget was set, resulting in the financial savings.

- The savings that had been secured would be returned to balances, which would help the Council to address one of the concerns that had been raised by the external auditors in the Section 24 Notice.
- The one exception to this was expenditure in respect of the strategic purpose 'help me run a successful business', where there had been an overspend of £486,000. This was largely due to a significant loss of income for Rubicon Leisure Ltd from January 2020 onwards, due primarily to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The Council had budgeted to spend £9.8 million in the capital budget but there had been an underspend of £6.9 million during the year. The Corporate Management Team (CMT) had been concerned that this was not acceptable and therefore Officers were working to ensure that this did not occur again in future.
- Savings had been achieved in relation to the HRA so only £26,000 had been required from balances to balance the budget for the year, meaning that the Council retained more than the minimum level of balances.
- However, there remained concerns about levels of expenditure for the HRA and this would need to continue to be carefully managed moving forward.
- The Council would be putting up to £1.3 million into reserves which would help to ensure the sustainability of services moving forward.
- The Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Resources would be requesting an additional meeting of the CRWP in due course to discuss further delegations to the Section 151 Officer in respect of grants provided to the Council.
- A new fee was proposed for customers undertaking journeys on a Dial a Ride vehicle for medical appointments. This fee had been proposed because the journeys tended to involve delivering and collecting a single customer and therefore were more expensive for the Council.

Members subsequently discussed the report and commented on a number of points in detail:

- The budget that had previously been agreed for the new IT system for Environmental Services and the reasons why additional funding was now required. Officers explained that previously a request had been made for a certain amount of capital funding, based on external advice, but it had since become clear, based on market testing, that additional funding would be required.
- The timeframes for the introduction of a new Environmental Services IT system. Officers explained that it would take at

least 12 months, after the procurement of a system, to obtain some functionality.

- The length of time that the Council might use the IT system for and the need for the Council to have access to IT systems that would enable the authority to operate as a modern business.
- The potential for this system to be integrated with other Council IT systems and the need to have access to the right type of Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) to achieve this.
- The potential for a section on IT integration to be a mandatory part of Committee reports when Members were discussing documentation relating to IT programmes. Officers explained that the Council's report template was in the process of being reviewed and that this suggestion could be taken into account as part of that process.
- The value of jointly procuring a new IT system for Environmental Services with Bromsgrove District Council, as a consequence of the authorities' shared services arrangements.
- The procurement process for obtaining a new IT system for Environmental Services.
- The need for the new IT system for Environmental Services to enable staff to undertake mobile working.
- The level of overspend on the strategic purpose 'help me run a successful business'. Members noted that there was a typographical error in the report and the actual figure was £486,000.

At the end of the debate Members noted that this would be the last meeting of the Executive Committee that the Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Resources would attend before leaving the organisation. Members thanked the Executive Director for all her hard work over the previous years, particularly in respect of responding to the Section 24 Notice and Members passed on their best wishes for the future.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the current financial position in relation to revenue and capital budgets for the year April 2019 – March 2020 as detailed in the report be noted.**

RECOMMENDED to Council

- 2) **approval of the movement of £1,105k in existing reserves;**
- 3) **the addition of new reserves of £1,380k;**

- 4) the carry forward to the 2020/21 capital programme of £6,749k;
- 5) approval of the inclusion of the Town Deals fund revenue grant of £173k in 2019/20 together with all associated costs;
- 6) an increase to the revenue budget for 2020/21 due to receiving £40k SEP Grant (Strategic Economic Plan);
- 7) a capital grant to Worcestershire County Council for improvement works at Holly Trees Children's Centre leased by Redditch Borough Council (Parenting Support) of £15k in 2019/20;
- 8) an increase in the 2020/21 Capital Programme of £839k for Disabled Facilities Grants. This is due to the budget allocations having now been announced by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG);
- 9) the following additional new fees for Dial A Ride be introduced for 2020/21:
 - a) Dial A Ride Medical journey £4 with concessionary bus pass
 - b) Dial A Ride Medical journey £5 without concessionary bus pass
- 10) to increase the management fee to Rubicon Leisure by £413k from other service savings in 2019/20. This is to offset the shortfalls in income that the company has faced in 2019/20;
- 11) an increase in the 2020/21 Capital Programme of £12k for the HMO (House in Multiple Occupation) Lifetime Loans Budget. This is due to the growing need for HMO type accommodation across the Borough to meet the need of single persons and those on low incomes; an
- 12) an increase in the 2020/21 Capital Programme of £119k for additional funds towards the already approved capital project for Environmental services new IT system.

(During the consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person

Executive Committee

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(including the authority holding that information). There is nothing exempt, however, in this record of proceedings.)

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 8.51 pm