



Council

Monday, 25th January, 2021

MINUTES

Present:

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

Officers:

Ruth Bamford, Kevin Dicks, Claire Felton, Chris Forrester and Sue Hanley

Senior Democratic Services Officers:

Jess Bayley and Amanda Scarce

50. WELCOME

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

51. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Salman Akbar, Joanne Beecham, Juliet Brunner and Nyear Nazir.

Members were advised that Councillor John Fisher would be leaving the meeting early.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Brandon Clayton, Bill Hartnett and Ann Isherwood declared other disclosable interests in respect of Minute Item No 58 – the Executive Committee - in relation to the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Tuesday, 12th January 2021. During this meeting Members had agreed the allocation of Flexible Homelessness Support Grant funding to external organisations, including Fry Accord, part of the Accord Group. All three Members had been appointed by the Council to serve on Redditch Co-operative Homes, which was also part of the Accord Group, as an

Chair

outside body. However, they had no involvement with Fry Accord and there were no decisions in respect of this matter required during the Council meeting.

Councillors Tom Baker-Price, Brandon Clayton and Andrew Fry declared other disclosable interests in respect of Minute Item No. 60 – Blue Light Hub – Middlehouse Lane Report - due to their involvement as members of the Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority. They remained in the meeting during consideration of this item and participated in the vote.

Councillor Matthew Dormer declared a pecuniary interest in respect of Minute Item No. 60 – Blue Light Hub – Middlehouse Lane Report - due to his position as a paid firefighter. He left the meeting during consideration of this item and did not participate in the debate or vote thereon.

53. COUNCILLOR PATTIE HILL

The Mayor introduced a tribute to a former colleague, Councillor Pattie Hill, whose death following a prolonged period of illness had occurred in December 2020.

The Leader of the Minority Group commenced the tributes to Councillor Pattie Hill and delivered a personal tribute. Members were advised that Councillor Hill had been kind, compassionate and caring, with an interest in line dancing and Elvis Presley.

The Leader of the Council then led other Members in expressing their thoughts on the character and achievements of Councillor Pattie Hill. All agreed that she had been a passionate proponent of causes in which she believed, particularly in respect of children and young people, and a dedicated Borough and County Councillor as well as a former Mayor, having served in that position in 2015/16. Members expressed their condolences to Councillor Hill's husband and family and noted that she would be missed by the Council and community.

During consideration of this item Council observed a minute's silence as a mark of respect.

54. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 16th November 2020 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Mayor.

55. ANNOUNCEMENTS

a) The Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor announced that sadly since the previous meeting of Council Mr Mal Smith, the partner of the Deputy Chief Executive, had died following a long illness. On behalf of the Council the Mayor extended his condolences to the Deputy Chief Executive and to Mr Smith's family and friends.

A list of the Mayor's civic engagements had been provided in the Council agenda for Members' consideration.

b) The Leader's Announcements

The Leader advised that The Artrix in Bromsgrove had been opened that day as a vaccination centre in respect of Covid-19. This news was welcomed, and the Leader thanked all the staff who had worked hard to ensure that the venue could be provided for this purpose.

During consideration of this item the Leader thanked all staff working in the NHS for their hard work. It was acknowledged that NHS staff were doing a phenomenal job at a challenging time in the middle of a pandemic.

c) The Chief Executive's Announcements

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

56. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 9)

Councillor Tom Baker-Price asked the Leader the following question:

"Does the leader agree with me, that the council should investigate the feasibility of obsoleted council IT being donated for refurbishment, then used by children without computer access and by partnering with the local VCS groups we could support many vulnerable children with little expense?"

The Leader provided the following response to this question:

"Due to the recent equipment replacement project for Member IT facilities, there are a number of Member iPads that are no longer needed and will be returned to the Council. This equipment may be suitable to donate for the purpose outlined by Councillor Baker-Price. However, it is important to note that the iPads are quite old,

in technology terms, and are close to becoming obsolete, with the latest Apple security updates no longer being available for these devices. However, it is possible that a local charity or other suitable agency may be able to make use of these devices and as such IT can securely wipe any data on these machines and make them available to be donated to an agency determined by Members, as soon as the iPads are returned to the Council.

With regards to ongoing obsolete IT equipment, the Council has recently completed a replacement of Terradici devices (network connected dumb terminals) with new laptops to enable more remote working due to the current pandemic. Over the last few years, the Council has made extensive use of Terradici devices due to their longer lifespans but the onsite nature of these devices is no longer appropriate for the more flexible and remote approach to work that is now required. The removed Terradici devices are not suitable for reuse as they are essentially virtual dumb devices that are not designed to hold any software.

In order to make best use of its technical estate, the Council maximises the use of laptops, PCs and other devices right up to the point where they will no longer accept the latest Microsoft security software, effectively rendering them obsolete. As a consequence of this practice the Council has very few, if any, old devices that could be usefully repurposed by a local VCS group. Other than the iPads mentioned previously any other old technical equipment is effectively unusable in any other environment.”

Councillor Tom Baker-Price subsequently asked the following supplementary question:

“We know many Councils in the country, such as Litchfield District Council and Salisbury City Council, are donating equipment and I’m happy to hear Redditch Borough Council will be doing the same. Will you join me in encouraging local businesses to donate their equipment, once it is over four years old, in order to benefit children?”

The Leader provided the following response to this supplementary question:

“I’m sure we can look into this and I’ll talk to the relevant Officers.”

57. MOTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 11)

Members were advised that there were no Motions on Notice for consideration on this occasion.

58. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Council considered minutes from meetings of the Executive Committee held on 8th December 2020, 12th January 2021 and 19th January 2021.

The following items were discussed in detail:

Fees and Charges 2021/22

Members discussed the fees and charges that had been proposed for 2021/22. During consideration of this report, Members noted that whilst some fees would be increased at a standard 2 per cent others would not increase at all. However, there were some fees where a greater increase had been suggested and concerns were raised about the proposed 5.8 per cent increase for the bulky waste collection service, which represented a 50 pence increase. On the one hand, Members raised concerns that the increase could result in a rise in fly tipping, at a significant cost to the Council and questions were raised about the potential to decrease the fee. On the other hand, Members commented that the fee for the bulky waste collection service had not increased since 2018, the fee compared favourably to that charged by other local authorities for a similar service and the increase would help to cover the costs of the service. Members also commented on the alternative options available to bulky waste collections, including recycling and reuse.

Financial Monitoring Report Quarter 2 2020/21

The Financial Monitoring Quarter 2 report 2020/21 was discussed and Members welcomed the proposed investment in the Arrow Valley and Morton Stanley Parks, which would involve resurfacing works and the introduction of a café and toilets at Morton Stanley Park. Members commented that investment in outdoor facilities during the pandemic would have a positive impact on the wellbeing of local residents.

Discussions were also held about the financial position of the Council. On the one hand, Members commented that the Council had received Government grant funding which had helped the authority to manage the impact of Covid-19. On the other hand, concerns were raised that the Section 24 Notice that had been issued against the Council by the external auditors in 2019 still remained in place.

Independent Remuneration Panel 2021/22 Report

Members considered the Independent Remuneration Panel's recommendations regarding Members' allowances for 2021/22 and in doing so commented on the independence of the panel. The

Independent Remuneration Panel was thanked for their hard work. However, Members commented that during a global pandemic, at a time when many people were struggling financially, it was difficult to justify an increase to Members' allowances. For this reason, Members agreed that the basic allowance and Members Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) should remain unchanged.

Redditch Town's Deal – Town Investment Plan

Members considered the Redditch Town Investment Plan and during the debate in respect of this matter the following issues were highlighted:

- The positive impact that the proposed £25 million investment, should it be approved by Government, would have on the regeneration of Redditch town centre.
- The fact that Redditch had been shortlisted for funding. Members noted that some towns had not been successful when they had applied for support from the Town's Fund.
- The work of the Town's Board, comprising representatives of the private, public and third sectors, in respect of the proposals. Members thanked the Board, particularly the Chair and Vice Chair, for their hard work.
- The hard work of Officers to support the proposals, particularly officers working for the North Worcestershire Economic Development Unit (NWEDR).
- The consultation that had been carried out during the development of the plan. Members noted that there had been over 700 responses and that this consultation process had occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The stakeholder engagement that had taken place with elected Members and the feedback that had been provided by Members.
- The potential for further action to be taken to enhance the skills and aspirations of local residents. Council was advised that this remained a local priority and had recently been raised at a meeting of the Worcestershire Leaders' Board.
- The opportunities that would be available in the future to continue to engage with the public regarding the proposals.
- The information that had been obtained from previous consultation exercises which had helped to inform the process.
- The information that had been provided on the Council's website about the Town's Deal. Members expressed disappointment that there had not been a bespoke website for the Redditch Town's Deal.
- The remaining projects that had not been included in the Town's Investment Plan. Members noted that the Town's Board had developed a range of ideas and these would be in

an ideal position to pursue further, subject to additional funding being made available.

- The history of Redditch and the potential for that heritage to be promoted throughout the town.
- The specific projects that had been proposed for the railway quarter and for the library in the town centre.
- The future of the library in Redditch town centre. Members commented that there would continue to be a library in the town centre but it would be positioned in a slightly different location.
- The Mary Portas review of town centres, that had been conducted a few years previously, which had highlighted the integral role of housing within town centres moving forward.
- The contribution that had been made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee through pre-scrutiny of the proposals and the further updates that the Committee would receive in future years.
- The future position of Redditch in the twenty-first century and the contribution that the digital economy could make to the town. Members noted that 5G would have a particularly beneficial impact on the town as a digital technology hub.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meetings of the Executive Committee held on 8th December 2020, 12th January 2021 and 19th January 2021 be approved and all recommendations adopted.

59. COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

Members noted the appointments replacing Councillor Pattie Hill on the following Committees:

- Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel – Councillor Debbie Chance
- Licensing Committee – Councillor Mark Shurmer
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Councillor Yvonne Smith.

60. BLUE LIGHT HUB - MIDDLEHOUSE LANE REPORT - (REPORT TO FOLLOW)

The Chief Executive presented a report proposing the introduction of a Blue Light Hub on Middlehouse Lane.

Council was informed that a key part of the proposals for the regeneration of Redditch town centre was the redevelopment of the current police station site. The building was not considered to be fit for purpose as a police station in the twenty-first century. The

Council had worked with West Mercia Police and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority on the idea of introducing a blue light hub in a central location in Redditch. In order to realise this vision, it was proposed that the Council should swap land owned at Middlehouse Lane with land owned by Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority. Approval of this proposal would enable partner organisations to move forward with the introduction of a blue light hub and would ensure that plans for the redevelopment of the town centre could proceed.

Members discussed the proposals and in doing so commented that neither the current police station nor the current fire station in Redditch were fit for purpose and both buildings had issues with asbestos. The proposals would provide greater opportunities for young and existing firefighters and would also lead to the introduction of housing in the town centre on a brownfield site.

During consideration of this item Members asked about the extent to which there would be a police presence in the town centre, should the proposals be approved. Officers explained that discussions had been held with the Chief Constable regarding this matter and it was clear that there would need to be some form of police presence in the town centre, though the arrangements for this remained to be confirmed.

Reference was also made to the tenure of the housing that would be introduced on the brownfield site. Officers explained that, due to the exempt nature of the information required, a response regarding this matter would be made available to Members outside the meeting.

Concerns were raised about the fact that the proposals would result in relatively modern buildings being demolished. Questions were raised about the potential for the buildings to be reused and for the designs for the new blue light hub to focus on the durability of the building where the hub would be based moving forward. However, Members noted that both the existing fire station and the police station had been constructed in the post war period with materials that had not necessarily been designed to last.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Council owned land located at Middle House Lane be declared surplus;**
- 2) the proposed land swap to facilitate the redevelopment of the joint blue light hub, involving the exchange of Council owned land located at Middle House Lane (Plot 1) with**

land located at Middle House Lane owned by Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority (plot 4) be approved;

- 3) a remediation strategy for the plots should be developed; and**
- 4) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive and Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services, following consultation with the Leader, to finalise the heads of terms and to proceed to completion.**

(Prior to consideration of this item, Councillor Matthew Dormer declared a pecuniary interest due to his position as a paid firefighter. He left the meeting and did not participate in the debate or vote thereon.)

61. OUTDOOR FITNESS EQUIPMENT (REPORT TO FOLLOW)

The Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services presented a report proposing the introduction of outdoor fitness equipment at the Abbey Stadium. Members were advised that Section 106 funding would be used to support this proposal. This funding had previously been reserved for expenditure in respect of the Abbey Stadium so could not be invested in anything else.

The Council considered the proposals detailed in the report. Members commented on the fact that ideally these proposals would have been approved earlier in the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to proceed, Rubicon Leisure Limited needed the Council's approval as the funding would be derived from a Section 106 agreement and the company did not have access to alternative sources of capital funding to support the proposals.

Reference was made to the process that had been followed in order to reach a decision on this matter. Members commented that they had previously been asked to approve the allocation of Section 106 funding to the installation of outdoor fitness equipment at the Abbey Stadium through the urgent decision process. However, Members had felt uncomfortable about being asked to approve the allocation of £250,000 of funding for this purpose without reference to Committee and about the level of transparency. For this reason, a request had been made for the report to be referred to Council.

Concerns were raised that the report had not been scheduled through the normal process for the consideration of the Executive Committee and Council. Members noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had also not had an opportunity to scrutinise the proposals and it was suggested that this scheme would have benefitted from scrutiny, particularly in assessing value for money.

Further concerns were raised about the short notice that had been provided in respect of the publication of the report, which had been circulated in a supplementary agenda pack for Members' consideration. There was general consensus that this should not be permitted to occur with any regularity in future, though it was highlighted that this was unusual. However, it was also noted that, the Section 106 funding had already been allocated for use in respect of the Abbey Stadium and there were limited options available in terms of alternative uses of the funding.

RESOLVED that

- 1) authorisation be granted for Section 106 (S106) monies in the amount of £257,273.02 to be transferred to Rubicon Leisure in line with the attached business case and S106 agreements for the construction of an outdoor gym facility at the Abbey Stadium;**
- 2) the Head of Financial and Customer Services, Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services and Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services be authorised to finalise the detail for the release of S106 monies for the outdoor fitness project following consultation with Rubicon Leisure and the relevant portfolio holder.**

62. URGENT BUSINESS - RECORD OF DECISIONS

Members were informed that there had been three urgent decisions since the previous meeting of Council. These urgent decisions related to the appointment of a new Section 151 Officer and Director of Resources, the Local Restrictions Support Grant and Additional Restrictions Grant and approval of an additional management fee for Rubicon Leisure Limited for quarter 2 of the 2020/21 financial year.

63. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

Members were advised that there was no additional urgent business for consideration on this occasion.