



MINUTES

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 11th January,
2022

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), and Councillors Joanne Beecham, Aled Evans, Peter Fleming, Anthony Lovell, Mike Rouse and Craig Warhurst

Officers:

Matthew Bough, Kevin Dicks, Claire Felton, Sue Hanley, James Howse, David Riley and Darren Whitney

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

52. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Gemma Monaco and Nyear Nazir.

53. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

54. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader advised that at the latest meeting of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group held on 10th January 2022 Members had pre-scrutinised the Financial Outturn Report 2020/21, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Rent Setting 2022/23, Fees and Charges 2022 and Council Tax Base 2022/23 reports, at Minute Item No.s 59 – 62 on the agenda for the consideration of the Executive Committee. However, as the group had made no recommendations on these items there were no referrals from the Budget Scrutiny Working Group for consideration at the meeting.

Members were advised that an updated copy of the appendix to the Fees and Charges 2022 report had been issued that day in the Additional Papers 1 pack. The Committee was urged to refer to this version of the appendix when debating that item.

55. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

Chair

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 15th December 2021 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

56. HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT 2022/23 (PREVIOUSLY FLEXIBLE HOMELESSNESS SUPPORT GRANT AND HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION GRANT)

The Housing Development and Enabling Manager presented a report on the subject of the Homelessness Prevention Grant settlement 2022/23 for the Council. This grant replaced the previous Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and the Temporary Accommodation Management Fund, which had been amalgamated. The Council was anticipating receiving £314,926 in the Homelessness Prevention Grant, which was ring fenced for spending on homelessness and homelessness prevention. There had been a £66,008 underspend on equivalent homelessness grants in 2021/22. Therefore, the Council had total grant funding of £392,134 to spend on homelessness and homelessness prevention in the 2022/23 financial year.

In line with previous years, the Council was proposing to allocate this grant funding to various different Voluntary and Community (VCS) organisations that worked to support homeless people and people at risk of becoming homeless, including young people. This would represent expenditure of £382,000 of the grant funding available. Officers were proposing that the Head of Community and Housing Services should be provided with delegated authority, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement, to make adjustments as needed during the year, including with respect to expenditure of the remaining funds.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement explained that the funding to the various VCS organisations had made a significant contribution to work to tackle homelessness in recent years and it was therefore important to ensure that this continued. A lot of work had been undertaken, in particular, to address issues with rough sleeping and to support young people who might otherwise struggle to access appropriate accommodation.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the following initiatives be approved to receive allocation of funding in 2022/23:**

| Initiatives | £ (up to) |
|---|----------------------|
| Redditch Nightstop - Outreach Worker to | 55,600 |

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| support 21 to 35 year olds and prevent homelessness or work towards planned moves into suitable and sustainable accommodation and the Safe Accommodation and Support scheme. | |
| Redditch Nightstop Core Funding | 13,000 |
| CCP Rough Sleeper Outreach Service - 2.8 FTE posts across Bromsgrove and Redditch | 75,246 |
| Fry Accord – 18 units of supported accommodation for Ex-Offenders or those likely to offend | 15,457 |
| St Basils – Provide 23 units of accommodation for young people aged 16- 23 years of age additional funding to provide 24 hour cover following a reduction in funding from County Council | 14,200 |
| Newstarts - Furniture Project to provide furniture for homeless households. | 5,000 |
| Homelessness Prevention - Spend to Save budget for use by Housing Options Officers | 17,060 |
| Temporary Accommodation Management – as 3.1 above | 66,380 |
| St Basils Smallwood Almshouses - Progression Coach to offer additional support that can operate outside of normal office hours to fit around a young persons education, training and employment. | 26,500 |
| Citizens Advice Debt Advice | 23,000 |
| Sanctuary Scheme for Victims of Domestic Abuse | 20,000 |
| Young Persons Pathway Worker | 26,000 |
| Crash Pad | 14,033 |
| County Partnership Manager | 6,300 |
| Hopes – Single and Childless Couples Homeless Prevention Service | 4,996 |
| Total | £382,772 |

- 2) **delegated authority be granted to the Head of Community and Housing Services following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement to use any**

unallocated Grant during the year or make further adjustments as necessary to ensure full utilisation of the Grants for 2022/23 in support of existing or new schemes.

57. COUNCIL TAX EMPTY HOME DISCOUNT AND PREMIUM

The Financial Support Manager presented a report which outlined proposals in respect of discounts and premiums for Council Tax payments for empty homes in the Borough. The proposed changes would come into effect from April 2022.

The Council's current scheme distinguished between existing homes that became vacant and new homes that became vacant. Owners of existing homes had to pay 50 per cent of the Council Tax for the first three months once the property became vacant whilst owners of new vacant homes, generally housing developers, were exempt from paying Council Tax for the first three months. Under the proposed new scheme, this distinction would end. No Council Tax would need to be paid on a vacant property for the first 14 days but subsequently 100 per cent of Council Tax would need to be paid. There would be exemptions from this rule, including for social and Council housing.

Consideration had been given to exempting vacant homes on the market from payment of Council Tax under this scheme, but the Council had concluded that payments should apply, partly because it was not clear that the legislation would permit this exemption and partly because the local housing market was buoyant. The Council could also use discretion to assess requests for exemptions on a case by case basis.

The report also proposed the introduction of premium Council Tax payments for homes that had been vacant for a long time. Under this part of the scheme, property owners would pay 100 per cent of Council Tax for homes that had been vacant for up to five years, 200 per cent Council Tax for properties vacant for between five and ten years and 300 per cent of Council Tax for properties that had been vacant for at least ten years. This was designed to discourage property owners from keeping homes vacant in the long-term.

Members discussed the proposals and in doing so commented that housing was in demand and it was therefore important to ensure properties were available on the local market. It was also noted that, should an exemption be applied to properties for sale, this might be used as an opportunity by a minority of unscrupulous property owners to avoid making Council Tax payments.

During consideration of this item, questions were raised about the potential impact that a limit of 14 days, in terms of the period in which property owners would not need to pay Council Tax on vacant properties, might have on landlords' ability to update a home before letting to new tenants. Concerns were raised that this might result in some landlords rushing to complete works, to the detriment of the property and experience of future tenants. However, Officers explained that previously landlords had had to pay 50 per cent of Council Tax from the first day on which a property became vacant and therefore this exemption for 14 days placed landlords in a better financial position in the short-term.

RECOMMENDED that

The Executive Committee is asked to RECOMMEND that:

- 1) from 1st April 2022 the level of Council Tax discount to be applied under Section 11A (4) and Section 11A (4A) for each class of dwellings as defined by The Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwellings) (England) Regulations 2003 (as amended) will be:**

**Class A ["second homes with a planning restriction"] 0%:
no discount**

**Class B ["second homes with a planning restriction"] 0%:
no discount**

Class C ["vacant dwellings"]

- a. Where the dwelling has been unoccupied and unfurnished for a continuous period of not more than 14 days - 100% discount**
- b. Where the dwelling has been unoccupied and unfurnished for more than 14 days - 0%: no discount.**
- c. Where the dwelling is**
 - i. unoccupied and substantially unfurnished; and**
 - ii. the owner of the dwelling is a local housing authority; and**
 - iii. when next in use the dwelling will be occupied under the provisions of the Housing act 1985****100% discount.**

Owner will be defined by reference to section 6(5) and 6(6) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

For the purposes of Class C when considering whether a dwelling falls within the description any period of occupation, not exceeding 6 weeks, during which it was not unoccupied and substantially unfurnished shall be disregarded.

Class D [“dwellings requiring major repair works”] - 100% discount

- 2) from 1st April 2022 the additional council tax premium applied under section 11B of the LGFA '92, for long-term empty dwellings will be**
 - i) for a dwelling that has been a long-term empty dwelling for less than 5 years – 100% premium**
 - ii) for a dwelling that has been a long-term empty dwelling for 5 years or more, but less than 10 years – 200% premium**
 - iii) for a dwelling that has been a long-term empty dwelling for at least 10 years – 300% premium**
- 3) the Head of Financial and Customer Services on a case-by-case basis may consider a reduction to the long-term empty premium.**

58. INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL 2022/23

The Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services presented the recommendations from the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) regarding Members' allowances in the 2022/23 financial year.

The IRP reviewed allowances paid to elected Members serving most of the district Councils in Worcestershire. The Panel comprised independent representatives of the local community. The Council was required to consider the IRP's proposals, although was not obliged to accept the Panel's recommendations.

In considering the recommendations, Members were asked to note that the IRP's proposals reflected their assessment of what they felt Members should be paid in terms of both the basic allowance and any Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) paid to certain Members for undertaking specific roles. The first recommendation, in respect of the proposed basic allowance for Members, was the level which had been proposed for other District Councillors in

Worcestershire. However, the percentage increase required to achieve that level of the basic allowance in Redditch would be higher than at some other Councils because Redditch Borough Council had opted not to increase Members' basic allowance for a number of years. This was not reflected in the IRP's report, which worked on the basis that Members would have agreed the Panel's proposals in previous years. The second recommendation from the Panel, in respect of SRAs, if approved, would result in changes to the SRAs paid to Members as the proposed calculations differed from the Council's current Scheme of Member Allowances. However, recommendations 3 – 6 in the report, concerning payment of travel claims, carers' allowances and payments to Parish Councillors, would not result in any changes.

During consideration of this item, Members were advised that there would need to be an amendment to the budget to reflect historic changes made to Members' allowances. This would be reported to Members in February 2022 in the Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23 to 2024/25. However, this did not have implications for the IRP's report.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed the proposals and in doing so commented on the decisions made by Members in previous years not to increase the basic allowance. Concerns were raised that this resulted in basic allowance payments to Redditch Members lagging behind elected Councillors serving at the other District Councils in Worcestershire. A decision to increase the basic allowance to the level suggested by the IRP would help to bring the basic allowance into line with that in place at other authorities. Concerns were also raised that it would not be appropriate to decline to increase basic allowances at a time of rising inflation.

However, Members commented that they did not feel, at this time, it would be appropriate to change the arrangements for SRAs in Redditch, as the current arrangements in place reflected circumstances for Members in the Borough.

Reference was made to the potential for a benchmarking exercise to be undertaken by the IRP in respect of basic allowances paid to Councillors in Worcestershire. Members commented that the last time such an exercise had been undertaken had been in 2016 and the pressures and workloads of Members had changed significantly since this date, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the Basic Allowance for 2022-23 is £4,732, representing a 6.648% increase;**

- 2) **travel allowances for 2022-23 continue to be paid in accordance with the HMRC mileage allowance;**
- 3) **subsistence allowances for 2022-23 remain unchanged;**
- 4) **the Dependent Carer's Allowance remains unchanged**
- 5) **for Parish Councils in the Borough, if travel and subsistence is paid, the Panel recommends that it is paid in accordance with the rates paid by Borough Council and in accordance with the relevant Regulations.**

59. **FINANCIAL OUTTURN 2020/21 REPORT**

The Executive Director of Resources presented the Financial Outturn Report 2020/21. Members were asked to note that in total an underspend of £373,000 had been identified by the end of the financial year. The underspend would be reinvested in the general fund position for the 2021/22 financial year. This underspend had a number of causes which included the following:

- Borrowing costs had been £183,000 lower than anticipated. This was due to low interest rates as well as to the short-term benefits arising from Government business grant funding being placed in the Council's accounts, though this grant funding had subsequently been distributed amongst eligible local companies.
- In total £330,000 savings had been achieved in respect of management of Council assets and properties. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Redditch Town Hall and other Council buildings had been closed to the public, with most staff working from home, and this had resulted in savings on utilities, particularly heating.

Following the presentation of the report, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling welcomed the underspend that had been achieved in the 2020/21 financial year. However, the Committee was advised that there remained significant financial pressures for the Council and difficult decisions would need to be taken to address these pressures.

The action that had been taken to achieve savings with respect to management of Council assets was praised, and the Corporate Management Team (CMT) were urged to consider further action that could be taken to achieve savings in future through management of Council assets. Officers confirmed that use of Redditch Town Hall was in the process of being reviewed. CMT were aiming to reduce footfall at the Town Hall and to enable an agile working model at the Council.

Reference was also made specifically to the savings that had been achieved in relation to heating the Town Hall and other Council buildings and the beneficial impact of new windows in the building on heating costs. The Committee was advised that further measures that could be adopted to address heating in Council buildings were being considered. However, Members were asked to note that any action might only be sufficient to offset anticipated increases to utilities costs, which were likely to increase by over 5 per cent in the 2022/23 financial year.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the current financial position in relation to the revenue budgets for the year April 2020 – March 2021 as detailed in the report is noted; and**
- 2) **the additional £120k of general covid grant that will be paid to Rubicon Leisure Limited to balance the year end position, as agreed by the S 151 Officer under delegated authority, be noted.**

60. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) RENT SETTING 2022/23

The Executive Director of Resources presented the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Rent Setting report 2022/23. The Executive Committee was informed that there were strict Government guidelines in respect of rent setting by Councils and these had been followed when calculating the proposed rent to be paid by Council tenants in the 2022/23 financial year. In total, a 4.1 per cent increase to rents for Council properties was being recommended.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement, in proposing the recommendations, commented that a 4.1 per cent increase to rents was below inflation. This, together with other Council pressures, would potentially have implications for the HRA moving forward.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **the actual average rent increase for 2022/23 be set as September 2021 CPI, 3.1%, plus 1% resulting in an increase of 4.1%; and**
- 2) **when void social rent properties are re-let. The rent will be set at the recalculated Target Rent (Formula Rent) for the new tenant.**

61. FEES AND CHARGES 2022/23

The Executive Director of Resources presented the Fees and Charges 2022/23 report for Members' consideration. Members were asked to note that the appendix to the report had been reissued in the Additional Papers 1 pack with slightly amended figures.

The principle underpinning the report was that, in the absence of better information, fees and charges would be set at a level to achieve full cost recovery. In general, this meant that it was proposed that the majority of fees and charges should increase by between 5 and 6 per cent, based on the best estimate by the Bank of England of the likely level of inflation by April 2022.

There were some exceptions, in terms of services where officers were not proposing to increase fees and charges. This included the charge for the Garden Waste Collection service, as Officers had concluded that an increase at this time would not be commercially viable. In addition, Officers were proposing no increases to the fees for the Dial a Ride, Lifeline and Shopmobility services, on the basis that these services were provided to some of the most vulnerable communities in the Borough. There were also some cases where the increase was slightly over or under 5 or 6 per cent, which had occurred where officers were rounding the charge up or down.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling welcomed the proposals detailed in the report. However, Members were asked to note that inflation levels were difficult to predict and it was possible that this would be higher than 6 per cent by April 2022, which would impact on the Council's financial position.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) Council approve all of the fees and charges; and**
- 2) Council agree that all fees and charges are charged commencing 1st April 2022.**

62. COUNCIL TAX BASE 2022/23

The Executive Director of Resources presented the Council Tax Base 2022/23 report for the Executive Committee's consideration. Members were advised that this report, which was prepared annually, contained technical information based on sound data. Officers had identified that the Council Tax Base was 26,546, relating to the number of Band D equivalent properties in the

Borough. This calculation was important as it enabled the authority to calculate Council Tax levels.

In proposing the recommendations, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling explained that there was a need to increase the Council Tax Base in the Borough. More Council Band D properties needed to be built in Redditch, as this would help to achieve that higher Council Tax Base.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **the calculation of the Council's Tax Base for the whole and parts of the area for 2022/23, be approved; and**
- 2) **in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992, the figures calculated by the Redditch Borough Council as its tax base for the whole area for the year 2022/23 be 26,546.63 and for the parts of the area listed below be:**

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Parish of Feckenham | 374.52 |
| Rest of Redditch | <u>26,172.11</u> |
| Total for Borough | <u>26,546.63</u> |

63. WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES (WRS) BOARD - BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Director of Resources presented the minutes of the meeting of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Board meeting held on 18th November 2021 at which budget contributions from partner authorities had been discussed. The proposed contributions had been reviewed in detail previously by senior Finance Officers from all of the authorities.

There were a number of budget pressures which were reflected in the figures reported to Members. This included pressures arising from anticipated pay increases, pension contributions, increases to the rent for the premises used by WRS and increases to the financial settlement for ICT support. Some of the pressures were more relevant to certain partner authorities than for others, such as for the Technical Officer for Animal Activity, which was reflected in the figures. In total, Redditch Borough Council's contribution would represent 17.53 per cent of the total budget for WRS in the 2022/23 financial year.

Members subsequently discussed the proposed budget settlement and in doing so noted that the Executive Committee could only determine the financial contribution from Redditch Borough Council. The flexible approach to funding different posts to meet varying

needs of partners in the county was welcomed as a fair funding model.

During consideration of this item, the Executive Committee praised WRS for the team's hard work during the Covid-19 pandemic. Members commented that WRS had had to address new work pressures during the pandemic, such as those relating to lockdown restrictions on businesses. The workload of the team had also been impacted in other ways, such as through the increase in noise nuisance complaints, which had arisen during the lockdowns when more people were based at home.

RECOMMENDED that

partner authorities approve the following for 2022/2023:

- a) the 2022/23 gross expenditure budget of £3,891k;
- b) the 2022/23 income budget of 634k;
- c) the revenue budget and partner percentage allocations for 2022/2023 onwards:

| Council | £'000 | Revised % |
|--------------------------|--------------|------------------|
| Redditch Borough Council | 572 | 17.53 |

- d) the additional partner liabilities for 2022/2023 in relation to unavoidable salary pressure:

| Council | £'000 |
|--------------------------|--------------|
| Redditch Borough Council | 14 |

- e) the additional partner liabilities for 2022/2023 in relation to hosting costs:

| Council | Increase in Rent £000 | Increase in ICT Hosting £000 | Increase in Support Hosting £000 |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|---|---|
| Redditch Borough Council | 1 | 3 | 2 |

- f) Approve the additional partner liabilities for 2022/23 in relation to three Technical Officers.

| Council | Tech Officer Income Generation £000 | Tech Officer Animal Activity £000 | Tech Officer Gull Control £000 |
|--------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Redditch Borough Council | 6 | 2 | |

64. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Leader confirmed that there were no updates from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on this occasion.

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

The Committee was advised that there were no referrals from either the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or the Executive Advisory Panels on this occasion.

66. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

The following verbal updates were provided in respect of the work of the Executive Advisory Panels and other bodies.

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

Councillor Lovell advised that there was due to be a meeting of the Climate Change Cross Party Working Group in January 2022.

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

Councillor Dormer advised that a meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Party was scheduled to take place on 3rd March 2022.

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

In the absence of Councillor Nazir, the Leader advised that there had been no further meetings of the Board since the previous meeting of the Executive Committee.

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

The Committee was informed that a meeting of the Member Support Steering Group was scheduled to take place on 15th February 2022.

e) Planning Advisory Panel – Chair, Councillor Matthew Dormer

Councillor Dormer explained that a meeting of the Planning Advisory Panel was scheduled to take place on 20th January 2022. All Members were urged to attend this meeting.

67. RELEASE OF COVENANTS AFFECTING LAND

The Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services presented a report on the subject of the release of a covenant affecting land at Overdale in Astwood Bank that had previously been sold by the Council. The covenant stipulated that the land concerned could only be used as a garden. However, a request had been received from the owner of the land to remove the covenant.

A quote had been received some time ago concerning the level of the capital receipt that would be generated for the Council as a result of removing this covenant. Officers were proposing a slight amendment to the proposals detailed in the report, and this was that there should be an up to date valuation undertaken.

The Executive Committee discussed the report and questioned the frequency with which covenants were applied and the reasons why the Council had applied a covenant to the sale of this particular land in 2009. Officers explained that this was a fairly standard arrangement and covenants were put in place to help protect the Council's interests. At the time that the sale occurred it was likely that the purchaser had asked for additional garden land.

Reference was also made to the planning process that would need to be followed should the covenant be released. Officers confirmed that the proper planning process would need to be followed in these circumstances.

RESOLVED that

- 1) subject to receiving an updated valuation, authority be delegated to the Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services, following consultation with the Leader, to negotiate and finalise terms for the release of covenants attached to LR Title No WR121916 in return for the capital sum; and**

RECOMMENDED that

- 2) the Council's budget is augmented by the capital receipt.**

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.32 pm