

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 8 December 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

Officers:

Kevin Dicks, Mike Dunphy, Clare Flanagan, Chris Forrester, Sue Hanley, Judith Willis and Kate Goldey

Senior Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley

38. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

40. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader advised that at the latest meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on Thursday, 3rd December 2020, Members had agreed recommendations on the subject of the Church Green Conservation Area and Management Plan and future versions of the Council's fees and charges report. These recommendations would be considered during the Executive Committee meeting.

41. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 27th October 2020 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

42. CHURCH GREEN DRAFT CONSERVATION AREA AND MANAGEMENT PLAN CONSULTATION

The Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager presented the Church Green Draft Conservation Area and Management Plan for Members' consideration.

The Committee was informed that the Council had a duty to designate conservation areas and to have plans for the management of those areas. The plan presented for Members' consideration built on previous strategies for the conservation area. There were a number of buildings in the conservation area which needed to be supported and enhanced.

During the development of the plan, a number of issues had been identified with the conservation area. The main challenges were the poor state of the public realm, issues with the shop fronts in the area, vacant units and parking issues close to St Stephen's Church and in the town centre. On Alcester Street there were a few buildings which had previously been left out of the conservation area which would be incorporated under the new proposals.

To address issues with vacant units, plans would need to be developed which would consider different approaches to managing town centres; traditional retail units were increasingly struggling and might need to be replaced with other options. The Redditch Town Deal would potentially provide some new opportunities. The Council was working with Worcestershire County Council and the North Worcestershire Economic Development Unit to address some of the problems that had been identified with the public realm. In addition, Officers were already exploring the potential to introduce Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) for locations within the conservation area where parking was a problem.

The work on the conservation area and management plan placed the Council in a position to apply for grant funding to help manage the conservation area. Funding was available from bodies such as Historic England and this type of funding had been used to positive effect in other parts of the country to enhance features in conservation areas.

Subject to the approval of the Church Green Draft Conservation Area and Management Plan, Officers were preparing to undertake consultation with relevant stakeholders about the details contained within the plan. This consultation exercise would be held early in 2021 and the outcome would be reported for Members' consideration at a later date.

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

- The contribution that the proposals detailed in the management plan could make to the wider plans for the regeneration of Redditch town centre.
- The risks to the heritage of the town centre should action fail to be taken in relation to the conservation area.
- The potential for modern infrastructure, such as electric charging points for vehicles, to be introduced in the conservation area. Officers reassured Members that this would be possible to do.
- The need for the Council to have a costed plan for any work proposed in relation to the conservation area.
- The impact of traffic in the conservation area and the potential for enforcement action to be taken in relation to the pedestrianised area on Alcester Street.

During consideration of this item Members noted that the Church Green Draft Conservation Area and Management Plan had been pre-scrutinised at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 3rd December 2020. The Committee had endorsed the recommendations contained within the report and had raised a number of important issues during their debate on the subject. In particular, a number of suggestions had been made about Unicorn Hill in Redditch town centre.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the draft Church Green Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan be endorsed; and**
- 2) a six week public consultation period be approved. The result of this consultation will be reported back to the Executive Committee in due course.**

43. DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY - IDENTIFYING ABUSE AND RESPONDING EFFECTIVELY

The Head of Community and Housing Services presented the Domestic Abuse Policy for the Executive Committee's consideration.

Members were advised that the policy set out how the Council would equip staff to identify and support victims of domestic abuse. The policy would enable the Council to respond to provisions in the Domestic Abuse Bill which, when it came into force in April 2021, would introduce a duty for local authorities to house victims of domestic abuse and their children. The legislation also introduced

a statutory definition of domestic abuse, recognising that it could be physical, emotional and / or coercive.

The policy also highlighted the action that was already taken by the Council to address domestic abuse. For example, the Council worked with a range of partner organisations and was part of multi-agency groups tackling domestic abuse.

In discussing the policy, Members commented that there had unfortunately been an increase nationally in the number of cases of domestic abuse that had been reported during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Council had a history of demonstrating this support, though participation in the White Ribbon Campaign and the Walk a Mile in Her Shoes initiative. The policy recognised that both women and men could be victims of domestic abuse.

During consideration of this item Members questioned whether the trades unions had been consulted about the content of the policy. The Committee was informed that relevant Officers had been consulted but there was some uncertainty about whether the trades unions had also been consulted. Officers undertook to consult with the trade unions after the meeting.

Reference was also made to the availability of training in respect of domestic abuse. It was suggested that this training should be made available to elected Members and that they should all be encouraged to attend. Members were advised that this suggestion would be referred to the next meeting of the Member Support Steering Group, which was responsible for determining Member training arrangements, for further consideration.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the draft Domestic Abuse Policy be adopted; and**
- 2) the Head of Housing and Community Services be given delegated authority to update and amend the policy in line with any new legislation and guidance, as and when required**

44. FEES AND CHARGES 2021/22

The Head of Financial and Customer Services presented the Fees and Charges 2021/22 report. Members were advised that in proposing the charges Officers had considered the potential for charges to be set at a level that would achieve full cost recovery. In some service areas there had been concerns about the potential impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on customers' finances and in

these instances the decision had been taken not to increase the fees.

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

- The balance that needed to be struck between setting fees that were financially prudent whilst also being compassionate towards the needs of customers impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The increase of 50 pence to the fee for the bulky waste collection service and the impact that this could have on customer demand. Concerns were raised that this could result in an increase in fly tipping.
- The extent to which people who had previously paid for a bulky waste collection service were likely to be deterred from paying for the service again due to a 50 pence increase.
- The standard number of items that tended to be disposed of by customers paying for the bulky waste collection service.
- The need for action to be taken to discourage people from fly tipping.
- The fact that an increase had not been made to the fee for the bulky waste collection service for some time.
- The level of increases that had been proposed to fees and charges. Concerns were raised that some charges would be increasing significantly though it was also noted that many would not change and some would only be increasing by the level of inflation.
- The recent meeting of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group at which the report had been pre-scrutinised.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) all of the fees and charges included in Appendix 1 be approved; and**
- 2) subject to the agreement of recommendation 1 above, these fees and charges should be charged by the Council commencing on 1st April 2021.**

45. FINANCE MONITORING QUARTER 2 2020/21

The Head of Financial and Customer Services presented the Financial Monitoring Report for the second quarter of the 2020/21 financial year.

The recommendations included a proposal to increase the management fee paid by the Council to Rubicon Leisure Limited. The cost of this would be covered using grant funding that had been

provided by the Government to the Council to help manage the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Council had received £1.6 million funding from the Government during the year for this purpose and £1.1 million remained available to spend.

There was an overspend on the strategic purpose 'Aspiration, Work and Financial Independence' of over £200,000. This was primarily as a result of an overspend on temporary accommodation for rough sleepers and homeless people during the Covid-19 pandemic. The strategic purpose 'Run and Grow a Successful Business' was also overspent by over £750,000. This was largely as a result of the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic had had on Rubicon Leisure Limited.

By contrast, there was an underspend for the strategic purpose 'Communities which are Safe, Well Maintained and Green' of £34,000. This was primarily due to a significant saving in the anti-social behaviour budget of £135,000. However, Bereavement Services had received less income than had been anticipated at the start of the year.

Enabling services were overspent by £281,000. This was primarily due to additional audit costs as well as extra costs associated with the introduction of the new finance ERP system. There had been difficulties with the introduction of this system due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and additional agency staff had had to be employed to help embed the system.

Officers were projecting a £2.4 million variance in the capital programme by the end of the year. The majority of capital projects that had not been delivered as anticipated had been postponed due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, contractors could not necessarily come on site to work when planned.

The Corporate Management Team were working hard to review the Council's budget position. It was hoped that there would be improvements to the accuracy of budget forecasting moving forward.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) had a surplus of over £200,000 by the date of the meeting. This was primarily due to savings in respect of Repairs and Maintenance (R&M) and Management and Supervision costs. During the Covid-19 pandemic it had not been possible for Officers to undertake the full range of R&M work that was required. However, it was anticipated that once the Covid-19 vaccine had been rolled out, the work of the team would increase and therefore this saving was not likely to be sustainable moving forward. The savings in supervision and management costs were mainly due to vacant posts, though the

service reviews that were being undertaken were likely to impact on this budget.

The Committee subsequently discussed the financial position of the Council by September 2020 and in so doing highlighted the following points:

- The recommendations detailed in the report proposed investment in leisure facilities, including the Council's parks and open spaces. Members noted that this was occurring at a time of high visitor numbers in the parks.
- The significant impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Rubicon Leisure Limited like many businesses in the hospitality industry.
- The figures that had been reported in respect of the overspend on the strategic purpose 'Run and Grow a Successful Business' and the fact that two figures had been supplied for this in the report. Officers confirmed that there had been a typographical error and the correct figure would be provided for the Council meeting.
- The savings that had been anticipated for the Dial-A-Ride service at the start of the year and the potential for lost income for the service to be recovered. Officers explained that it was unlikely that the lost revenue would be recovered by the end of the financial year but it was hoped that income targets could be met in the 2021/22 financial year.
- The potential use of the grant funding that had been provided by the Government to help the Council manage the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The Council's financial position moving forward and the likelihood that difficult decisions would need to be taken in order to achieve a balanced budget in the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2024/25.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the current financial position in relation to revenue and capital budgets for the financial period April 2020 – September 2020 be noted.**

RECOMMENDED that

- 2) an increase in the 2020/21 Capital Programme of £15k for Digital screens including installation at Arrow Valley Country Park be approved;**
- 3) an increase in the 2020/21 Capital Programme of £6k for an additional passing bay along the main access to the Arrow Valley Country Park be approved;**

- 4) an increase in the 2020/21 Capital Programme of £19.5k for resurfacing of pathway at Arrow Valley Country Park be approved;
- 5) an increase in the 2020/21 Capital Programme of £10k, for the already approved capital Scheme Café and infrastructure Morton Stanley Park, be approved. This will help towards ensuring all relevant carbon reduction measures are incorporated; and
- 6) an increase the management fee payment to Rubicon Leisure by £373k be approved for the second quarter of 2020 only, from the COVID-19 funding received from the central government along with confirming the first quarter increase (£170k) also being funded from this same funding stream. This is to offset the shortfalls in income that the company is facing in 2020/21.

46. **WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES - BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Head of Financial and Customer Services presented recommendations that had been agreed at a meeting of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Board held on 1st October 2020.

The recommendations requested additional funding from partner organisations to help cover increases to pension costs for staff, which had been higher than anticipated. Moving forward, a calculation had been made about the proportion of funding that should be contributed towards the cost of the service by each partner authority; the allocation for Redditch was 17.57 per cent.

During the meeting, the Board had considered a request received from Wyre Forest District Council, which provided accommodation for and hosted the IT provision for WRS, to increase the fee paid for these services. Concerns had been raised during the Board meeting about this request for additional funding contributions from partners at a challenging financial time for local government. Members echoed this point during the meeting and it was noted that the Leaders of Redditch Borough and Bromsgrove District Councils had communicated their concerns to Wyre Forest District Council on this subject.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1.1 the additional partner liabilities for 2020/21 in relation to increase in WRS pension forward funding rate and recommend the increase to individual partner councils:-**

Redditch Borough Council	£13k
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- 1.2 the additional partner liabilities for 2020/21 in relation to the additional increase in pay award of 0.75% from the original estimated 2% and recommend the increase to individual partner councils:-**

Redditch Borough Council	£4k
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- 1.3 the refund to Wyre Forest in relation to the change of Pest Control Services and recommend the refund to individual partner councils:-**

Wyre Forest District Council	£7k
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- 1.5 the revised budget for 2020/21 and partner percentage allocations for 2020/21 onwards, due to the change in pest control service at Wyre Forest:-**

	£'000	Revised %
Redditch Borough Council	564	17.57

47. DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES AND SECTION 151 OFFICER APPOINTMENT - VERBAL UPDATE

The Chief Executive advised that at a recent Appointments Committee meeting Mr James Howse had been appointed as the Council's new Section 151 Officer and Director of Resources. The appointment was a Council decision but as the next meeting of Council was not due to take place until the 25th January 2021 a decision had already been made to ratify the appointment through the urgent decision process.

48. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair confirmed that there were no recommendations arising from the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on

22nd October 2020 requiring the Executive Committee's consideration.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 22nd October 2020 be noted.

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

The Executive Committee considered a recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Budget Scrutiny Working Group about the Council's fees and charges reports. Members were advised that the recommendation applied to future versions of the fees and charges reports and not to the Fees and Charges 2021/22 report.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling Services confirmed that the Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group had phoned him in advance of the Executive Committee meeting to discuss the recommendation. She had explained the rationale for the recommendation and he was satisfied that the proposal would add value to the fees and charges setting process.

During consideration of this item an alteration was proposed to the wording of the recommendation by Councillor Mike Rouse. This alteration was seconded by Councillor Matthew Dormer.

The altered recommendation read as follows:

"Fees and Charges are set following due consideration of the strategy of each service area, taking into account overheads, business benefits deriving from such strategies, cost recovery and the provision of the service."

In discussing the proposed alteration, Members concurred that this did not change the general aim of the recommendation.

Members thanked the Budget Scrutiny Working Group for their hard work. Particular thanks were extended to the Chair of the group.

RESOLVED that in future years

Fees and Charges are set following due consideration of the strategy of each service area, taking into account overheads, business benefits deriving from such strategies, cost recovery and the provision of the service.

50. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

The following updates were provided in respect of the Executive Advisory Panels and other groups:

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

Councillor Lovell confirmed that he had recently met with Officers to discuss grant funding available to improve water quality in the Borough. Further opportunities to secure grant funding were also being explored.

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

Councillor Dormer commented that there had been a meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Party in November. The outcomes of this meeting had been considered during the November Council meeting.

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

Councillor Nazir informed the Committee that the Worcestershire Young People's Panel had set up a panel to train people in care about how to inform people about what they required from the care system.

Work was being undertaken to help children and young people who were struggling to attend school to find out how to help them to engage with the education system.

Apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers were also being investigated. This work was being undertaken out of recognition that care leavers often struggled to secure employment and educational qualifications and that apprenticeship opportunities might be a useful alternative for some people leaving care.

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

Councillor Dormer explained that there had been a meeting of the Member Support Steering Group in November. During the meeting, the group had discussed the potential for some Members to adopt a paperless approach to participating in Committee meetings. A number of Councillors had since indicated that they would adopt a paperless approach to

Committee meetings once meetings could take place physically.

e) Planning Advisory Panel – Chair, Councillor Matthew Dormer

Councillor Dormer noted that a meeting of the Planning Advisory Panel had taken place on 1st December 2020. During the meeting Members had considered the Church Green Draft Conservation Area and Management Plan.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.53 pm