



Council

Monday, 12th April, 2021

MINUTES

Present:

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

Officers:

Kevin Dicks, Claire Felton, Chris Forrester, Sue Hanley and James Howse

Democratic Services Officers:

Jess Bayley and Jo Gresham

1. WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all those present to the meeting.

During consideration of this item the Mayor led Members in paying tribute to His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh by observing a minute silence.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of Council held on Monday, 22nd February 2021 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Mayor.

Chair

5. ANNOUNCEMENTS

a) The Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor advised that he had no announcements to make with respect to civic engagements on this occasion.

During consideration of this item the Mayor announced that Councillors Roger Bennett, John Fisher, Mark Shurmer and Yvonne Smith would be standing down as Councillors in May 2021. On behalf of the Council, the Mayor thanked each of these Members for their hard work and public service during their time as Councillors.

Further comments in respect of the Members who were standing down were provided by other Councillors. Members commented that during his time as an elected Member, Councillor Bennett had served as the Mayor of the Borough of Redditch as well as serving on a number of Committees. It was noted that Councillor John Fisher had first been elected in 2012 and during his time as a Councillor had served as both the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management and the Chair of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee. Similarly, Councillor Yvonne Smith had first been elected in 2012 and since her election had been an active member of the Overview and Scrutiny process, though had also served as Portfolio Holder for Community Safety. Councillor Shurmer had first been elected over 20 years' ago and during his time had served as Mayor of the Borough of Redditch and Portfolio Holder for Housing. There was general consensus amongst Members that all four Councillors would be missed.

b) The Leader's Announcements

The Leader opened his announcements by expressing his condolences, on behalf of the Council, following the death of His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh. Council was informed that the Duke of Edinburgh had visited Redditch in 1978 to open the YMCA building in the Borough. The Duke of Edinburgh had served in the navy and provided support to the armed forces as well as to young people, particularly through the Duke of Edinburgh Award. During consideration of this item, Members joined the Leader in expressing their condolences to the Royal Family in respect of His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh.

Members were asked to note that it had been a difficult year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This had created challenges in

respect of holding civic events during the year. In this context, the Leader and other Members praised the Mayor for his hard work and fortitude.

Reference was made to the regulations that had enabled Councils to hold meetings remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Leader explained that from the 7th May 2021 onwards, local authorities would be required to return to holding meetings in person. The Leader and leader of the opposition had jointly written to the Right Honourable Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, urging the government to extend powers to Councils to continue to hold meetings virtually. In addition, the requirement to return to holding meetings in person was being challenged through the courts and this case was due to be considered on Wednesday, 21st April 2021. The Leader commented that, regardless of the outcome of the court case, it was envisaged that all informal and private meetings involving elected Members, such as Scrutiny Task Group meetings, would continue to take place virtually.

c) The Chief Executive's Announcements

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

6. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Green Homes Funding

Members discussed the £280,000 that had been allocated from the national Green Homes Funding Grant to Redditch Borough. This funding would be used to upgrade the energy efficiency of properties in the Borough that had an EPC rating of E, F or G. Households at risk of fuel poverty, on means tested benefits or with an income of under £30,000 would be eligible to apply for funding under this scheme.

There was general consensus amongst Members that the funding would have a positive impact on carbon emissions in the Borough. Questions were raised about the proportion of the grant funding that would be received by the Council for expenditure on Council properties. Officers confirmed that this information would be provided outside the meeting.

Financial Monitoring Report – Quarter 3 2020/21

The proposals detailed in the report in respect of the Council's budget position were briefly debated. Members commented that

there had been an underspend in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) in 2020/21, though this was primarily due to a reduction in the works carried out by the Repairs and Maintenance team during the Covid-19 pandemic for safety reasons. This work would be delivered at a later date.

During consideration of this item, clarification was requested with respect to the £200,000 that had been allocated to the bridge at Green Lane, Studley. The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services explained that the funding had been allocated to negotiations between the Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council and Warwickshire County Council, which would take time to complete. Any updates would be reported through the Executive Committee on to Council.

Reference was also briefly made to the hard work of the Financial Services team in respect of the Council's balanced budget position for 2021/22. Members extended their thanks in particular to the Head of Financial and Customer Services and the Senior Accounting Technician for their hard work.

Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board – Budget Recommendations 2021/22

Council was informed that the proposals detailed in the minutes from the latest meeting of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Board related to the budget for the service in 2021/22. Wyre Forest District Council had withdrawn a request for an increase in their fee to host IT services and to provide accommodation to WRS. Instead, this subject would be debated further by partner organisations in the summer. This change in position had resulted in a reduction in the budget contributions required from partner authorities towards WRS for 2021/22.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday, 23rd March 2021 be approved and all recommendations adopted.

7. POLITICAL BALANCE (REPORT TO FOLLOW)

Members considered a report setting out Committee seat allocations and the proposed political balance for the Council for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Political balance of the Committees of the Council be agreed as set out in paragraph 4.5;**
 - 2) **the arrangement where the seats on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are not allocated in accordance with the political balance requirements be continued;**
 - 3) **the arrangement where the seats on the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel are not allocated in accordance with the political balance requirements be continued;**
 - 5) **appointments by political group leaders to the places on each Committee etc. be noted;**
 - 6) **the Council appoints Chairs and Vice-Chairs to the Committees and other bodies as set out in Appendix 1; and**
 - 7) **appointments to Working Groups and other bodies listed in the appendix be agreed.**
8. **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21**

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Joe Baker, presented the Committee's Annual Report for the 2020/21 municipal year.

Councillor Baker commented that it had been a privilege to serve as the Chair of the Committee during the year. There had been a lot of cross-party working and this had helped the Committee to explore a range of subjects in detail in line with best practice. This had included scrutiny of the following subject areas:

- An update on the Council's community lottery
- The e-scooter scheme
- Skills in the local workforce
- Town centre regeneration
- An update on the new cemetery for Redditch
- The Church Green conservation area.
- The Dementia Task Group
- The Unicorn Hill Short Sharp Review.

Councillor Baker concluded by thanking all of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members for their hard work during the year. In particular, Councillor Baker thanked Councillors Michael Chalk,

Peter Fleming, Andrew Fry, and Jenny Wheeler, who all chaired specific scrutiny groups, for their hard work. Thanks were also extended to the Democratic Services Officer, Jo Gresham, for her hard work and support.

Following the presentation of the report, Members raised a number of points in relation to the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the 2020/21 municipal year:

- The extensive preparatory work required from the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to ensure that meetings ran smoothly.
- The valuable contribution that had been made by Councillor Michael Chalk, through the provision of written updates on the work of external scrutiny bodies, such as the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) and West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- The important role of Overview and Scrutiny within the local democratic process as a critical friend to the Executive Committee.
- The attendance of Portfolio Holders at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to speak on items within their remit.
- The support that had been provided by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in respect of the many improvements that had been made to Housing Services over the past two years.
- The update that had been provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in respect of the new cemetery provision in September 2020 and the extent to which further information on this subject would be made available for the Committee's consideration in due course. The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services explained that a report in respect of the new cemetery was being advertised on the Executive Committee's Work Programme for consideration in August 2021 and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would have an opportunity to pre-scrutinise this report.

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report 2020/21 be noted.

9. URGENT BUSINESS - RECORD OF DECISIONS

There were no urgent decisions for consideration at this meeting of Council.

10. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

There was no further urgent business for consideration on this occasion.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.02 pm