

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 13 July 2021

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), and Councillors Brandon Clayton, Peter Fleming, Anthony Lovell, Mike Rouse, David Thain and Craig Warhurst

Officers:

Kevin Dicks, Claire Felton, Mark Hanwell, James Howse and Ishrat Karimi-Fini

Senior Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

1. APOLOGIES

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

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had pre-scrutinised the Upper Norgrove House Report during a meeting held on Thursday, 8th July 2021. However, as no recommendations had been made on this subject the minutes of that meeting had not been presented for Members' consideration.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday, 23rd March 2021 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

5. BOMFORD HILL PATHWAY

A report in respect of the introduction of a pathway to a peace memorial at Bomford Hill was presented by the Portfolio Holder for Leisure.

The Committee was informed that Bomford Hill had recently been redeveloped and a new peace memorial had been installed. The Church Hill Big Local community group had raised funding to support the installation of a pathway to the memorial. The Council would utilise this funding to pay for the works to be completed and, consequently, there were no financial implications for the local authority. Consultation had been held in the community and this had established that there was local demand for a pathway to the memorial.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed the proposals in detail. Questions were raised about the location of the footpath. The Committee was advised that the footpath would be situated in a new location and the closest residential street would be Redstone Close.

Reference was made to the role of Church Hill Big Local in progressing this project in partnership with the Council. The Committee thanked Church Hill Big Local for the work undertaken by the group in respect of this matter. Members also raised the potential value of further work involving community groups working in partnership with the Council in future.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **the capital programme be amended to incorporate the budget for the works detailed in recommendation 2, and that works be undertaken to re-introduce a gravel pathway at Bomford Hill to improve access to the recently installed piece of memorial; and**
- 1) **the receipt of the total value of (£31,727.37) for the project plus a maintenance figure (£3,127) is received from Church Hill Big Local.**

6. MEMBERS' ICT POLICY

The ICT Transformation Manager presented the updated Members' ICT Policy.

The Committee was informed that the policy had been reviewed following changes to IT support for Members during 2020. At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic the IT team had realised that

Members' ipads were no longer fit for purpose. In particular, the ipads did not elicit good video or audio quality for Members participating in virtual meetings. Therefore, this equipment had been replaced during 2020.

The updated Members' ICT Policy provided Members with two options; Members could obtain a Council device, primarily a laptop or Surface Pro device; alternatively, Members could use their own device under the Council's Bring Your Own Device policy. The policy no longer referred to Blackberry software, which had ceased to be used by the Council in 2020. The Council had also introduced a policy of deleting emails after two years had elapsed.

There was the potential that the policy could make a positive contribution in respect of climate change. The Councillors' new equipment would enable them to participate in informal meetings virtually.

The Committee subsequently discussed the policy and in so doing noted that Members could choose to select both options, in terms of accessing their emails, as this would help to ensure that Members were able to respond to residents in a timely manner. Members welcomed news that the Council would no longer be using the blackberry software, noting that this had not been used in most work environments for many years.

Members thanked the ICT team for their hard work during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was noted that the Council's IT provision had progressed during the lockdown in response to circumstances. However, concerns were raised that some Members were still experiencing problems when using their Council IT equipment. Officers advised that the Council had employed a Members' ICT Support Officer and he would be available to provide support to Members moving forward.

RESOLVED that

the proposed Member ICT Policy be agreed and implemented for all Members and that the options within it be made available to Members.

7. COVID-19 BUSINESS GRANT FUNDING

The Executive Director of Resources presented a report updating Members on the distribution of Covid-19 Business Grant funding in Redditch. The report had been prepared for noting in order to provide the Executive Committee with assurance that the funding was being distributed to local businesses.

The distribution of grant funding was occurring in a complex funding environment. Strict criteria applied to the distribution of these grants to local businesses and the Council had had to comply with this. There had been a significant amount of money provided to local businesses through a range of grants, valued at a total of £22.9 million. Wherever possible, the Council would seek to allocate all of the grant funding provided by the Government for the use of businesses. However, the level of the grant provided by the Government to the Council was based on an estimate of the level of need in the area and sometimes the level was overestimated, meaning that some funding would be left over. Where funding was not spent, this had to be returned to the Government. Members were informed that unlike other Councils, there had not been a significant issue with fraud when distributing the grant funding to local businesses.

The Committee subsequently discussed the report and in so doing thanked Officers for their hard work in respect of distributing grant funding to local businesses. Members noted that this work had had to be addressed in addition to existing work responsibilities and had benefitted many local businesses that had struggled during the Covid-19 pandemic. Officers were also thanked for bringing forward a report in respect of this matter as it helped to ensure that there was transparency about the arrangements in place locally to distribute the business grant funding.

Members noted that two of the grants, the Restart grant and ARG grant, remained available to businesses and Officers were urged to promote the availability of this funding to local companies. Officers confirmed that the Council remained on track to distribute the ARG grant funding that had already been received by the end of July and this would result in the Council receiving a further tranche of ARG funding.

During consideration of this item, Members questioned whether any tangible information had been provided about the impact that the grant funding had had on businesses, including the number of jobs that had been saved as a consequence. Officers explained that this data was not yet available and would need to be monitored through ongoing work in respect of economic regeneration.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

8. COVID-19 GRANT FUNDING - DELEGATIONS

The Executive Director of Resources presented a report detailing proposals for Officers to receive delegated authority to manage

funding allocated to the Council by the Government to help manage local recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic. The Committee was advised that this did not relate to the business grant funding, which had been discussed earlier in the meeting. Instead, the delegation would enable Officers to utilise funding provided by the Government for recovery purposes in a timely manner, rather than having to wait until use of the funds was approved at a Council meeting. There was a risk that, if the Council could not act quickly in respect of this additional funding, the authority would lose out on an opportunity to secure further funding for recovery purposes. Should authority be delegated to Officers, it would only be used following consultation with the Leader and Officers would need to comply with the relevant conditions applying to the grant funding.

Members subsequently discussed the proposed delegation and noted that this related specifically to funding intended to aid local recovery following the pandemic, not to all areas of local government finance. There were tight timescales in which the Council could act and the delegation would ensure that Officers could secure and use available funding in a timely manner to benefit the local community.

RECOMMENDED that

authority be delegated to the Executive Director of Resources to accept, administer and distribute any Government Funding, or Funding from bodies acting on behalf of Government, relating to or in response to the Covid 19 emergency and to make the necessary and corresponding adjustments to the MTFP following consultation with the Leader and subject to meeting the conditions of grant funding.

9. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Leader advised that there were no recommendations arising from the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 18th March 2021.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 18th March 2021 be noted.

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

The Leader confirmed that there were no referrals from any Committees for consideration on this occasion.

11. 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 advised that a meeting of the group was due to take place the following week. Officers were investigating the subject of electric charging points for vehicles and it was anticipated that a contract would be put out to tender in respect of this matter shortly. The climate change implications of long grass were also being considered.

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

Councillor Dormer advised that a meeting of the group was scheduled to take place on 14th October 2021.

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

In the absence of Councillor Nazir, the Chair proposed that an update should be provided in respect of this matter at the following meeting of the Committee.

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

The Committee was informed that a meeting of the Member Support Steering Group took place on 21st June 2021. During this meeting, Members had agreed that a survey should be circulated among new Members to gauge their views on the induction process. This survey would be circulated in due course.

- e) Planning Advisory Panel – Chair, Councillor Matthew Dormer

Councillor Dormer confirmed that there were no scheduled meetings of the Planning Advisory Panel.

12. FINANCIAL UPDATE REGARDING LEISURE SERVICES

The Executive Director of Resources presented a report detailing the financial implications of the position of Rubicon Leisure Limited for the Council. The report had been drafted following the

Executive Committee's identification of Rubicon Leisure Limited as a potential financial risk for the Council.

The Committee was informed that it was a difficult time for the hospitality industry. Rubicon Leisure Limited had been impacted by the pandemic like other leisure companies. Significant progress had been made by the company in terms of identifying action that could be taken to improve the financial position of Rubicon Leisure Limited moving forward. However, further action would be needed and the Managing Director was working hard to address this.

Members discussed the report and noted that reference was made to the business plan 2021/22 for Rubicon Leisure Limited. Questions were raised about how this business plan would be approved and Officers clarified that this role had been delegated to the Shareholders Committee.

During consideration of this item, Councillor David Thain, as Chair of the Shareholders Committee, explained that at a recent meeting of the Committee Members had approved the business plan 2021/22 for Rubicon Leisure Limited. Whilst progress had been made he commented that further action was required and the Committee had clarified that there a business plan covering a three-year period would need to be developed.

RESOLVED that

- 2) the financial context and risks set out in section 3 are noted;**
- 3) the decision taken by members of the Shareholders Committee (in line with the Council's Constitution) to approve a revised one-year Rubicon Business Plan is noted; and**
- 4) the requirement to support the mitigating actions as set out in Section 7 is noted as is the work undertaken by officers to determine a longer term business plan focusing on financial sustainability and relevant and appropriate service delivery.**

13. LAND AT UPPER NORGROVE, WEBHEATH

The Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services presented a report updating Members on the position of the former Upper Norgrove House site in Webheath. This site had been the subject of a number of previous reports, most recently in 2019. Unfortunately, the Council had not been able to achieve a desirable outcome through discussions with a number of local landowners,

due to a range of complex reasons. Therefore, the Council was proposing to take alternative action with the adjacent landowner. There was the potential for the adjacent landowner to apply for planning permission for access to their land which would need to be considered through the Council's planning process.

The Committee discussed the report and in so doing noted that a significant amount of work had been invested in trying to address the issues identified at previous Committee meetings when discussing the former Upper Norgrove House site. Members expressed the hope that, should a resolution be found, action could be taken at the site that would benefit the local community.

RESOLVED that

- 5) the advice document at appendix 1 to this report be noted;**
- 6) approval be given to a joint marketing exercise of the site known as Upper Norgrove Webheath with the adjacent landowner; and**
- 7) authority be delegated to the Head of Legal Democratic and Property Services and the Executive Director of Resources following consultation with the Leader of the Council to market and dispose of the site.**

The Meeting commenced at 6.33 pm
and closed at 7.21 pm