



Executive Committee

Tuesday, 7th December,
2021

MINUTES

Present:

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

Officers:

Kevin Dicks, Claire Felton, Sue Hanley, James Howse and Steve Shammon

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

36. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Gemma Monaco.

During consideration of Minute Item No. 41, the Chair was called out of the meeting to attend an emergency incident. In the absence of both the Chair and the Vice Chair, Councillor Mike Rouse was nominated to Chair the rest of the meeting.

37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

38. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader explained that Minute Item No. 40 – the Financial Outturn Report for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 2020/21 – had been pre-scrutinised at a meeting of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group held on 6th December 2021. However, no recommendations had been made by the group on the subject of the report.

39. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 26th October 2021 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

40. FINANCIAL OUTTURN 2020/21 - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

The Executive Director for Resources presented the Financial Outturn Report 2020/21 for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The Committee was informed that the HRA had been underspent during the year by £1.9 million. There were a number of reasons for this underspend, which were mainly related to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This included a reduction in expenditure on Repairs and Maintenance during the various lockdowns. However, it was anticipated that the work that had not been delivered during this period would be undertaken during the 2021/22 financial year.

During consideration of this item, Members were asked to note that there had been a typographical error in the recommendation listed in the report. The housing rents capital budget would need to increase by £465,000, rather than £436,000. Furthermore, this would involve a process of reallocation, or the virement of funding, within the overall HRA capital budget rather than an increase to the budget.

Following the presentation of the report, the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement explained that the proposed reallocation of £465,000 in the HRA capital budget would help to support the roll out of the Council's new Housing IT system. The new Housing IT system would be replacing the Saffron system that was still being used by the Council but which was not considered to be modern software. The new system would be introduced in a context of significant change within the Housing Department, following a staff restructure and at a time when rent arrears were increasing due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on tenants' personal finances. Training would be provided to staff to enable them to make best use of the new IT system as soon as possible.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling also commented specifically on the report. Members were asked to note that the funding for the £465,000 that would be reallocated to support the Housing IT system would be provided from the HRA and would not impact on the general fund position.

Reference was made to the backlog in terms of the work of the Repairs and Maintenance team, arising due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and questions were raised about how this work could be addressed in a timely manner. The Committee was advised that external contractors would be procured to help clear the backlog, although the Council's Repairs and Maintenance team would continue to undertake work and would be prioritising particular jobs for completion over forthcoming months.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the outturn financial position (subject to audit) in relation to the HRA revenue and capital budgets for the year April 2020 – March 2021 as detailed in the report be noted; and**

RECOMMENDED that

- 2) a total of £465,000 be reallocated in the Housing Rents Capital Budget to the Housing System Capital Budget.**

41. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2022/23 TO 2024/25 UPDATE

The Executive Director of Resources provided an update on the preparation of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23 to 2024/25.

The Committee was informed that unfortunately there were challenges in terms of the Council's balances moving through the three year period of the plan. The plan would therefore need to focus on increasing balances during the period. There were also budget pressures arising from both pay related and non-pay related increases in inflation which represented a risk to the budget. Officers were proposing that the Council should increase Council Tax by £5 in 2022/23 and this would be built into assumptions when developing the plan. There were further options available to the Council to help balance the budget and these would be explored further over the following months.

Following the presentation of the report, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling explained that the presentation provided a useful update on the position of the Council in the budget preparation process and ensured that there was transparency in this process. Members were asked to note that the Executive Committee would be required to make some difficult decisions in order to achieve a balanced budget. The Council would also need to prioritise action that could be taken to increase the authority's balances. Unfortunately, there remained a lot of uncertainty about local government finances and this made it difficult to prepare a budget. Council Tax remained a significant contributor to local authority finances and it was important to try to increase the Council

Tax base in respect of Band D properties and above, as this would have a positive impact on the budget moving forward.

The update was subsequently discussed by Members and concerns were raised about the potential impact that inflation could have on the Council's budget. The Committee was advised that the proposed increase of £5 to Council Tax was at the maximum level by which an increase could occur without the requirement for a local referendum to take place. However, this increase would not be sufficient to cover the impact of increases in inflation, which were particularly likely to have implications in respect of income from fees and charges. Therefore, inflation was a risk to the Council which would need to be managed.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

42. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Officers confirmed that there were no outstanding recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 21st October 2021 for the Executive Committee's consideration.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21st October 2021 be noted.

43. MOBILE HOMES ACT 2013 - INTRODUCTION OF LICENSING FEES

The Private Sector Housing Manager presented a report on the subject of the introduction of licensing fees under the Mobile Homes Act 2013.

Members were informed that the Mobile Homes Act 2013 introduced the potential for Councils to charge licensing fees to cover the costs of various activities associated with site inspections, including an annual site inspection. Inspections were undertaken to ensure that there was compliance with required standards. The legislation also permitted Councils to serve notice, which previously could only be undertaken following court action.

There were no mobile home sites in the Borough on the date of the meeting. However, Officers were aware of 10 applications having been submitted to the planning department relating to mobile home sites. The introduction of licensing fees for mobile home sites

would ensure that there would be a clear framework in place prior to the introduction of any such sites.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed the potential for mobile home sites to be introduced in the Borough. Officers clarified that the sites that were the subject of the Council's planning process could involve single units or a collection of units at one site.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement explained that the proposed licensing fees had been suggested at a level that would cover costs but which would not be punitive. There would be a fine of £5,000 in cases where non-compliance was identified.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the Mobile Home Fee Structure is approved and implemented to all relevant sites throughout Redditch Borough and reviewed on an annual basis; and**
- 2) the recovery of expenses through enforcement action is approved and implemented to all relevant sites throughout the Borough.**

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

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

45. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

The following updates were provided in respect of the Executive Advisory Panels and external bodies:

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

Members were advised that a meeting of the Climate Change Cross Party Working Group was scheduled to take place in January 2022.

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

Officers confirmed that a meeting of the group was due to take place on 3rd March 2022.

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

Councillor Nazir explained that a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board had taken place on 23rd November 2021. During the meeting, the Board had received a presentation on the subject of Worcestershire Children First and the Board's pledges to looked after children and care leavers. Members were advised that the Board had been keen for district Councils to sign up to the pledges.

Clarification was provided that the pledges were as detailed below:

- We will ensure that your voice is heard and that you are involved in decisions about your life.
- We will ensure that you have a safe, secure and stable home in which to live.
- We will help you stay in touch with your family, friends and anyone else who is important to you.
- As your corporate parent, we will celebrate your progress and achievements.
- We will make sure you are offered a health assessment and help you to access services that keep you healthy.
- We will support your lifelong learning and developing independence through ensuring you can have access to education, training and work experience.
- We will help you to build trusting relationships with key people in your life.

Members commented that these pledges were very important and would in principle receive the support of the Executive Committee. However, it was suggested that it would be more appropriate for a decision to be taken in respect of this matter through the submission of a Motion on Notice on this subject for consideration at a forthcoming meeting of Council.

At the meeting of the Board held on 23rd November, a presentation had also been delivered on the subject of the new Kick Start Scheme. Worcestershire Children First had created a new administrator post which looked after children could apply for. In addition, the Board had received an update in respect of the shortages in terms of trained foster carers in Worcestershire. Attempts were being made to recruit more trained foster carers in the county.

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

Officers confirmed that a meeting of the Member Support Steering Group was due to take place in February 2022.

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

Members were informed that no meetings of the Planning Advisory Panel were scheduled to take place.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.12 pm