

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 14th June, 2022

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), Councillor Nyear Nazir (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Karen Ashley, Joanne Beecham, Peter Fleming, Lucy Harrison, Anthony Lovell, Emma Marshall and Craig Warhurst

Also Present:

Councillors Joe Baker, Juma Begum and Sid Khan

Officers:

Peter Carpenter, Sarah Davis, Claire Felton, Sue Hanley, James Howse and Deb Poole

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence from Members.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader advised that at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9th June 2022, the Committee had pre-scrutinised the Council Plan, the Council Tax Support Scheme and the Review of Learning Online. The Committee had endorsed the proposals in respect of the Council Tax Support Scheme and Learning Online and had made an additional proposal in relation to the Council Plan. An extract from the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been published in a supplementary pack for the Executive Committee meeting in respect of the Council Plan and Members were urged to refer to this during the debate in respect of this item.

Chair

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 22nd March 2022 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. BROMSGROVE AND REDDITCH DUTY TO CO-OPERATE

The Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services presented the Bromsgrove and Redditch Duty to Co-operate report for the Executive Committee's consideration.

Members were informed that, like many local authorities, both Redditch Borough Council and Bromsgrove District Council were in the process of reviewing the content of their Local Plans. In the existing Bromsgrove Local Plan, Redditch was due to receive over 2,000 houses built in the District to help meeting the Borough's housing targets. However, since the previous Local Plan was agreed, it had been found that Redditch would require far fewer new houses by 2040 than had originally been anticipated. Officers were suggesting that the 2,000 houses should be returned to Bromsgrove and Bromsgrove District Council would then determine how this housing would be allocated.

Moving forward, Redditch Borough Council needed to continue to work closely with Bromsgrove District Council on the preparation of the Local Plans. There needed to be a shared understanding of local housing needs between the two Councils and ongoing co-operation.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed the content of the report and the possible implications of returning the 2,000 houses to Bromsgrove District Council's housing development figures. Concerns were raised that, in the long-term beyond 2040, this could result in the need for Redditch Borough Council to undertake development on green belt land. However, Officers explained that it was unlikely that a planning inspector would be supportive of arguments that the housing figures should be retained by Redditch Borough Council to help meet housing needs after 2040. There were other local authorities in the region that would potentially need to claim these houses in order to meet their housing development targets.

RECOMMENDED that

the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Redditch Borough Council and Bromsgrove District Council be agreed.

6. COUNCIL PLAN (INCLUDING RECOVERY AND RESTORATION PLAN)

The Head of Business Transformation, Organisational Development and Digital Strategy presented the Council Plan, including the Restoration and Recovery Plan, for Members' consideration.

The Executive Committee was informed that the existing Council Plan had been reviewed at a series of workshops attended by Portfolio Holders and senior officers. The intention of these workshops was to provide an opportunity to review whether the content of the Council Plan remained relevant and viable, following the Covid-19 pandemic. At the workshops no changes had been suggested to the Council's strategic purposes or priorities. However, it had been proposed that the green thread, which ran throughout the plan, should also become a specific priority within the Council Plan.

The Restoration and Recovery Plan had been developed by Officers in 2020/21 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Many of the actions detailed in the plan had already been delivered or were in the process of being delivered and a further refresh of the plan was not considered necessary.

During consideration of this item, Members noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had pre-scrutinised the Council Plan at a meeting held on 9th June 2022. The Committee had highlighted the need for action in respect of brown bins, as part of action on the green thread. Members commented that the comments made in respect of this matter by the Committee were valid and reflected the importance of the green thread. However, it was also noted that the Government was due to issue legislation which would provide further clarification as to whether brown bin services would be free or subject to a charge moving forward. In this context, Members commented that it would be appropriate to refrain from amending the content of the Council Plan in respect of this matter at this stage until that legislative position had been clarified.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had also commented on the need for the Council Plan to reflect the importance not just of recruiting suitably qualified employees but also of staff retention. Members commented that this was a high priority for the Council and a crucial consideration in respect of the authority's recruitment process.

Members noted that within the report reference had been made to the agile working policy in place for Council staff. Whilst Members recognised that this was an effective and efficient way of working, a

request was made for the report to also clarify that face-to-face work would continue in order to meet the needs of customers who were unable or unwilling to use digital technology. It was agreed that further information about the division of time for staff between remote and home working would be helpful.

Reference was made to the requirement for Councils to introduce a food waste collection service and to extend garden waste collection services in the future. Members raised concerns about the need to think carefully about any charges levied for these services, particularly for residents living in flats who did not have access to gardens. There was general consensus that the Government's requirements would need to be reviewed carefully and the approach adopted by other Councils would be taken into account to ensure that lessons were learned.

Consideration was given to the progress that was being made by the Council in terms of achieving the authority's strategic purposes and priorities and questions were raised about the potential for data to be shared with Members in respect of this matter. Officers clarified that the Council was in the process of developing a new corporate dashboard that would contain a lot of useful data that could be accessed by Members. There would be reports on the subject for Members' consideration and it was anticipated that Members would also be able to access the data online in the future.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the Council Plan Addendum 2022/23 be approved and included alongside the current RBC Council Plan 2020/24; and**
- 2) the Recovery and Restoration Plan 2020/21 be agreed and closed.**

7. DIGITAL STRATEGY

The Head of Business Transformation, Organisational Development and Digital Strategy presented the Customer and Digital Strategy for the Executive Committee's consideration.

Members were advised that during the Covid-19 pandemic there had been an increasing move nationally towards using digital technology for service delivery. The Customer and Digital Strategy assumed that there would be a digital first approach to service delivery at the Council. This would help to improve service efficiency, although it was recognised that there were some customers who were not comfortable with or able to access digital technologies and their needs would continue to be met.

There were four key themes in the Customer and Digital Strategy:

- Digital customer
- Digital workforce
- Digital leadership
- Digital infrastructure

Members welcomed the Customer and Digital Strategy and commented that adoption of this policy would enable the authority to undertake modern ways of working moving forward.

RESOLVED that

8. the Customer and Digital Strategy be agreed and adopted FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

The Interim Head of Financial and Customer Services presented the Financial Monitoring report for Members' consideration.

The Executive Committee was informed that the report related to the financial performance of the Council in the first 11 months of the 2021/22 financial year. An underspend was anticipated in the general fund. The Council had not had to use £1 million of Covid-19 grant funding, and this would be retained for use in the following financial year. Whilst some adjustments would be required for the twelfth month of the financial year, it was not anticipated that these would be significant.

A significant underspend was anticipated for the capital budget. A similar situation had been reported by many Councils across the country, due to competition over materials, labour and other key resources needed to deliver capital projects.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was in a better position than previously anticipated. There had been underspends in areas such as on vacant posts and on expenditure in Repairs and Maintenance. However, some capital projects had been delivered, including upgrades to the bin sheds for some of the Council Houses in the Borough.

Members welcomed the report and in so doing commented on the pressures on the Council's budget arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and the action that had been taken to address this.

RESOLVED to note that

- 1) **the forecast 2021/22 outturn position in relation to revenue budgets based on the financial period April 2021 – February 2022 would be a projected revenue underspend of £136k;**
- 2) **Capital expenditure to date would be £1.3m against a total an approved programme of £9.9m; and**
- 3) **HRA net revenue expenditure would be £240k better than expected although Capital Expenditure would £5.3m less than budget.**

9. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME -UPDATE

The Interim Head of Finance and Customer Services presented an update on the Council Tax Support Scheme for Members' consideration.

The Executive Committee was informed that the report detailed arrangements for the scheme that were already in place as well as proposals for consultation on changes to the scheme for the 2023/24 financial year. There would be a number of options available to the Council in respect of the next Council Tax Support Scheme. Any changes to the scheme would need to be subject to public consultation. There would also need to be consultation with all the precepting authorities.

Members welcomed the report in respect of the Council Tax Support Scheme and the requirement for consultation in relation to any changes to the scheme. It was suggested that it might be helpful to offer incentives within the scheme to encourage people to foster children in the Borough.

During consideration of this item, Members noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had pre-scrutinised the report at a meeting of the Committee held on 9th June 2022. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee was thanked for their hard work scrutinising the scheme.

RESOLVED that

- 4) **the present scheme be noted; and**
- 5) **the proposed consultation process for the 2023/24 scheme be approved.**

10. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair advised that the recommendation detailed in the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 17th March 2022 had been considered at the previous meeting of the Executive Committee.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17th March 2022 be noted.

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

The Chair advised that there were no specific referrals from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or any of the Executive Advisory Panels on this occasion.

12. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

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

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

Councillor Lovell advised that a meeting of the Climate Change Working Group had been held in March. The main issues that were in the process of being considered by the group were:

- Electric charging points for vehicles. Consideration was being given to working in partnership with other organisations to deliver electric charging points across the Borough. The Council already planned to install 50 electric charging points.
- Benchmarking data that could be used to help the Council to track progress in tackling climate change. This could be used to monitor areas such as the use of fossil fuels by the Council over time.

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

Councillor Dormer explained that a meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Party was in the process of being rescheduled to take place in July 2022.

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

Councillor Nazir commented that the latest meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board had taken place on 12th May 2022.

During the meeting, a presentation had been delivered on the Corporate Parenting Board's pledges. Members had been advised that these were important aims which covered primary needs such as supporting and listening to looked after children and care leavers. However, it was important to ensure that the pledges were put into practice and prompt cards were being developed with input from young people to help achieve this.

Worcestershire Children First had recognised that there were some weaknesses in their service which were being addressed through the Connect programme, specifically around the 18+ pathway plans. A project to ensure all young people had access to some forms of identification was being delivered, as not all young people had access to this at present.

The Board had heard from three young people who had helped to launch the Kick Start Programme peer mentors' scheme. This had officially been introduced by Worcestershire Children's First's Business Support team. Three new job roles had been created as part of the programme. The Board had heard first-hand how this programme had given these individuals valuable opportunities and enabled personal development.

A new policy was in the process of being developed for when friends and family took care of young people who were classed as children in need. The policy would not be called a fostering policy but would suggest a way of working which allowed family values to be promoted and followed the duty to help children in care to access a connected person to take care of them in the first instance if the parents were unable to cope.

The Board had also noted the content of a quarterly data information report. Members of the Board had requested a report at a future meeting containing more data, with a specific focus on placements outside the county.

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

Councillor Dormer explained that a meeting of the group was in the process of being rescheduled to take place in July 2022.

e) Planning Advisory Panel – Chair, Councillor Matthew Dormer

Members were informed that a meeting of the Planning Advisory Panel had taken place in May 2022. During this meeting, Members had considered the content of the Bromsgrove and Redditch Duty to Co-operate report.

13. REVIEW OF SERVICE PROVISION - LEARN ONLINE

The Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services presented a report detailing a review of the Council's Learning Online service.

Members were informed that the service had been reviewed as a result of the Council's budget setting process. The Council currently delivered the Learning Online service, which was a discretionary service and the service added value to the local community. However, a key question for Members to consider was whether the authority should continue to deliver the service moving forward. Alternatively, the Council could choose not to renew a contract with Herefordshire and Worcestershire (HoW) College when this came up for renewal in July 2022. The Executive Committee was asked to note that, should the Council choose not to renew the contract, the authority would be obliged to ensure that support was provided to the existing cohort of customers to enable them to complete their studies.

The report had been pre-scrutinised at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9th June 2022. During the meeting, a number of issues had been raised in respect of alternative service providers. Worcestershire County Council had subsequently confirmed that that authority provided the same courses as Learning Online in respect of English and Mathematics. In addition, Worcestershire County Council provided certain IT courses that were not available to access from Learning Online. Worcestershire County Council had been providing remote learning courses during the pandemic, although would be returning to provision of face-to-face training in due course. For both online and face-to-face training the courses were tutor-led.

Should the Executive Committee decide to cease to provide the Learning Online service, this would be subject to the outcomes of formal consultation with staff. As no such decision had been taken to date, formal consultation had not yet been undertaken with staff.

However, staff had been informally consulted on the proposals. Staff had reported that they provided support to a range of customers, including residents with barriers to learning. The Learning Online service provided a nurturing environment designed to support adult learners and to enable them to achieve their potential.

Members discussed the report in detail and in doing so questioned whether ceasing to provide the service at the end of the financial year, rather than the academic year, would have a detrimental impact on learners. Officers explained that this would be subject to the extent to which customers successfully completed their examinations. Should the Council cease to provide the service in December 2022, all of the current cohort apart from eight customers would have completed their studies. Should the Council wait until the end of the financial year then all of the participants should have completed their studies. There was the potential that some existing customers would want to transfer to alternative service providers whilst others might opt to continue to receive a service from Learning Online until the end of their studies.

Reference was made to the availability of alternative service providers and the organisations that could provide these services. Officers highlighted the information that had been provided in an appendix to the report concerning alternative service provision. Worcestershire County Council and HoW College were the larger local service providers but there were other organisations operating in both the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and private sector that could potentially provide training to adults in future. There was no guarantee that a like-for-like service would be made available to residents should the Council cease to provide the Learning Online service. However, many of the courses offered by the Learning Online service were accessible from other providers operating in the Borough and online.

Reference was made to the number of customers who were currently registered with the Learning Online service. Officers clarified that there were 40 customers registered with the service and in various stages of training, although all would be on track to complete their studies by the end of the academic year in May 2023. Should the Council agree to cease to provide the service, then any potential customers who approached the Council in the future would be referred on to alternative providers. Information would also continue to be published on the Council's website for signposting purposes.

During consideration of this item, Members were advised that if they were minded to cease to provide the Learning Online service, an additional proposal delegating authority to officers to undertake a

piece of work to enable existing customers to complete their studies by the end of the academic year would need to be approved.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Council cease to provide the Learning Online service by the end of the 2022/23 academic year; and**
- 2) authority be delegated to the Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services and the Head of Financial and Customer Services to undertake work to enable existing customers of the Learning Online Service to complete their studies by the end of the academic year.**

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.31 pm