

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 9th June, 2022

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Bill Hartnett (Chair), Councillor Joanna Kane (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Salman Akbar, Michael Chalk, Brandon Clayton, Sid Khan and Timothy Pearman

Officers:

Peter Carpenter (on Microsoft Teams), Kevin Dicks (on Microsoft Teams), Claire Felton (on Microsoft Teams), Sue Hanley and Deb Poole (on Microsoft Teams).

Democratic Services Officers:

Jo Gresham

1. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received by Councillor Imran Altaf and Councillor Gareth Prosser.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no Declarations of Interest nor of any Party Whip.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 17th March 2022 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

Chair

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17th March 2022, be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no public speakers registered on this occasion.

5. REDDITCH TOWN INVESTMENT PLAN BUSINESS CASES - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Chair informed Members that since the publication of the meeting agenda the Redditch Town Investment Plan Business Cases had been deferred and would now be considered at an extra meeting of the Committee. Members agreed that the date for the extra meeting would be 23rd June 2022.

6. LEVELLING UP FUND 2 BID - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Chair informed Members that since the publication of the meeting agenda the Redditch Town Investment Plan Business Cases had been deferred and would now be considered at an extra meeting of the Committee. Members agreed that the date for the extra meeting would be 23rd June 2022.

7. COUNCIL PLAN (RECOVERY AND RESTORATION PLAN)

The Head of Business Transformation, Organisational Development and Digital Strategy presented the report in respect of the Council Plan (Recovery and Restoration Plan). During consideration of this report, Members were informed that the current Council Plan was developed prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, a review of the priorities contained within the Plan was undertaken in 2021. As a result of this review, an Addendum was produced which was designed to sit alongside the approved Council Plan. The Addendum included the previous priorities, which were still considered fit for purpose, however more prominence was given to the Green Thread. This Addendum would provide an intermediary position prior to the review of the Council Plan due to take place in 2024.

Following the presentation of the report Members queried the following areas:

- The procurement of an energy advice service – It was clarified that Act On Energy had recently been procured by the Council to provide residents with information, advice and support in managing and reducing energy costs.
- Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) – Members were informed that in this instance, the assets referred to within the report were ‘human resources’ within a community rather than ‘physical’ assets. It was clarified that Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN) had secured funding for three Community Development Officers to work within the identified wards to help build on the strengths and skills already present within those communities.
- The allocation of Safer Streets Funding – Members were interested in better understanding the rationale behind the choice of Woodrow as the recipient of the funding and whether this kind of funding would be made available to other wards in the future. Officers explained that this funding was a Central Government initiative that was linked to specific funding criteria. It was reported that a partner based approach had been undertaken when bidding for the funding, and that data and evidence collected as part of the bidding process had to highlight a clear indication of need within the ward. Officers acknowledged that this kind of funding would be beneficial to other wards. However due to the availability of grants and funding and the specific nature of the criteria this was not possible.
- Redeployable Cameras – Members were informed that the use of redeployable cameras were used in areas of specific need and that there were criteria, as set out by the Police and Crime Commissioner, that needed to be met in order to redeploy them to specific areas. Officers undertook to contact the CCTV & Telecare Services Manager to provide further information regarding this to Members.
- ❖ *Green Thread – It was requested that a potential additional success measure in terms of the Green Thread should be increased access to brown garden waste bins within the Borough. Members noted that residents currently had no*

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access to these bins and that this should be made a priority for the future. It was acknowledged that this was a very popular service and needed to be expanded to benefit the residents. The Committee agreed that this issue needed to be highlighted to the Executive Committee for them to consider for the future.

- Face-to face interaction with officers within the Council – Members highlighted that some residents had raised concerns with difficulties in accessing face-to-face interactions with officers within the Council, particularly in respect of Housing. Officers noted that a project looking at the way in which Customer Services worked was currently being undertaken and that it was envisaged that any changes implemented would enable residents to access more general advice and guidance in one place rather than having to contact multiple officers. Some Members commented that although some residents were happy with a more digital way of accessing Council services there would be residents that wished to speak to officers in person and that this should be considered when looking at services for the future.
- Rough Sleepers – Members were informed that the number of rough sleepers within the Borough were identified as part of a count on a particular night. Therefore, the information included within the Recovery and Restoration Plan was a snapshot in time and could change. Officers outlined to the Committee that the Housing Options Team provided significant support to those in need within Redditch. This support included finding permanent accommodation to those who were rough sleeping.
- ❖ *Recruitment and Retention of Staff – Members commented on the priority of High Quality Services included in the Council Plan Addendum. It was noted that although it was important to recruit more staff, equally important was the retention of staff. Particularly at the current time when it was difficult to recruit staff to vacancies, within the Public Sector. This was acknowledged by the officers present and Members were informed that the Head of Business Transformation, Organisational Development and Digital Strategy was undertaking a piece of work looking at workforce planning and the development of skills for the*

future. It was agreed by Members that this was another area to highlight to the Executive Committee for consideration.

RECOMMENDED that

subject to the concerns raised, as detailed in the preamble above, regarding the Garden Waste Service and the future retention of Council staff, being noted by the Executive Committee for future inclusion in the Council Plan

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

8. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME - UPDATE - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Interim Head of Finance and Customer Services (Deputy S151) presented the Council Tax Reduction Scheme report and provided information on the review of the current scheme and the proposed consultation process for the 2023/2024 scheme.

During consideration of this report the following was discussed in detail:

- As part of the review of the current scheme options to assist with the current rise in the cost of living would be considered.
- The way in which the consultation would be carried out. It was confirmed that it was a legal requirement under Section 1A (3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 that consultation must be undertaken and that this would be carried out later this year. Along with the public it was clarified that major precepting authorities must also be consulted regarding review of the Council Tax Reduction scheme. Members were keen to understand the process that would be undertaken when consulting with the public. Particularly as the details of the scheme were technical and might be difficult for residents to understand fully. Members were informed that the documentation would be vastly

simplified in order for it to be more understandable to all residents and that the consultation would be carried out so that it could be accessed by as many residents as possible. There was a query regarding how the consultation was undertaken in the previous year and officers undertook to provide this information to the Committee.

The recommendations contained within the Executive report were proposed and seconded and it was

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **the present scheme be noted the present scheme; and**
- 2) **that the proposed consultation process for the 2023/24 scheme be approved.**

9. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME - SELECTING ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY

The minutes from the Executive Committee meeting held on Tuesday 22nd March 2022 were submitted for Members' consideration. Members noted that the decision in respect of the Declaration of Land surplus to requirement at Lodge Road/ Union Street, Smallwood and available for disposal had been resolved at the last meeting of the Executive Committee. Some Members felt that this was a positive move for the Council as this parcel of land would now be available to provide housing that was needed by residents.

The Chair requested that information on Key and Non-Key Decisions be provided to Members at this meeting. The Senior Democratic Services Officer provided the information and informed Members that if they needed any further clarification, they could approach the Democratic Services team who would be happy to provide further assistance.

RESOLVED that

the Executive Committee Minutes and Scrutiny of the Executive Committee's Work Programme be noted.

10. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair presented the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for consideration by the Committee. He explained to Members that generally the use of PowerPoint should be kept to a minimum during presentation of reports, with the exception of short presentations of very specific areas of scrutiny.

Councillor Khan suggested that a potential area of work for the Committee could be scrutinising health inequalities within the BAME community in Redditch. Officers confirmed that if this was to be proposed as a Task Group investigation then a scoping document would need to be submitted for approval by the Committee at a future meeting.

RESOLVED that

The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be noted.

11. TASK GROUPS, SHORT SHARP REVIEWS AND WORKING GROUPS - UPDATE REPORTS

Councillor Kane, in her role as Chair of the Budget Scrutiny and Performance Working Groups updated the Committee in respect of the meetings for the next municipal year. Members were informed that the dates of the first meeting had been confirmed and that further meetings dates would be sent out once Members of the Working Groups had confirmed their availability.

RESOLVED that

the Task Groups, Short Sharp Reviews and Working Groups - Update Reports be noted.

12. EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - UPDATE REPORTS

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Councillor Chalk provided an update to Members regarding the meetings of the External Scrutiny Bodies that had taken place since the last meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

It was confirmed that he would continue to provide written updates to the Committee.

RESOLVED that

the External Scrutiny Bodies - Update Reports be noted.

13. LEARNING ONLINE- PRE-SCRUTINY (REPORT TO FOLLOW)

The Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services presented the update in respect of Learn Online. During consideration of this report the following was highlighted for Members' attention:

- The Learn Online service was not part of the Council's core business and had limited attendance. It was reported that there were other providers in this space that did provide this kind of service. Members were informed that currently there were 40 registered users that utilised the service. It was clarified to Members that the savings of £70k would help to alleviate the current gap in funding of £900k within the Council's finances.

Members were interested as to whether this service was available in Bromsgrove and officers clarified that this was not a service provided in Bromsgrove. In addition to this, Members queried how the current users felt about the potential changes to the service and the impact that this would have on them. It was highlighted that an Equalities Impact had been carried out and although there was no guarantee that a third party provider would deliver exactly the same service, officers would work with partners to help signpost the services that would be available in the Borough in order that residents could access these in the future.

It was queried as to why the service had been set up in the first instance as presumably there was a need for this kind of provision. The officers present did not know the details as to why the service

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was initiated but undertook to provide further information to Members.

Members asked it to be noted that there was some hesitation from some Members in ceasing the Learn Online service however on being put to the vote it was

RECOMMENDED 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 8.02 pm