



Executive Committee

Tuesday, 12th July, 2022

MINUTES

Present:

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

Officers:

Peter Carpenter, Kevin Dicks, Claire Felton, Clare Flanagan and Chris Wells

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

20. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Craig Warhurst.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

22. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader advised that, at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7th July 2022, Members had pre-scrutinised the Asset Rationalisation for Community Centre, Easemore Road and the Future Use of the Town Hall and Customer Access reports. The Committee had agreed recommendations on both of these reports which had been detailed in extracts from the minutes of the meeting, circulated for the consideration of Members of the Executive Committee in a supplementary pack for the meeting. The Executive Committee was encouraged to refer to these extracts from the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting when debating those items.

23. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 28th June 2022 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

24. ASSET RATIONALISATION FOR COMMUNITY CENTRES AND EASEMORE ROAD

The Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services presented a report in respect of asset rationalisation of the community centre located on Easemore Road, Redditch.

The Executive Committee was informed that the Property Services team had been undertaking stock condition surveys. A stock condition survey had been completed in respect of the community centre located on Easemore Road at an early stage of this process because the Council had received reports that the building was in a poor state of repair. The survey had concluded that a significant amount of work would be required to address these issues and to make the property suitable to let at a commercial rate moving forward.

There were a number of long-term tenants which used the community centre on Easemore Road as premises. Many of these tenants were Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations and they had approached the Council to ask about alternative accommodation due to concerns about the building's state of disrepair. Officers had been working closely with these tenants to try to help find them alternative premises. Gemini Dance Studio, which was one of the existing tenants that had benefitted from a meanwhile use letting arrangement at the community centre for many years, had not yet identified suitable alternative accommodation, although the Council continued to try to provide assistance in locating alternatives.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed the debate regarding this report that had occurred at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7th July 2022. It was noted that during this meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Members had recommended that the Council should defer making a decision on disposal of the community centre until a full review of the Council's assets had been completed. Members considered this recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and in doing so commented on the following points:

- The work that was already being undertaken by the Council in respect of the stock condition surveys that were being completed on Council assets and the fact that these surveys had not been undertaken in previous years.
- The work that had been undertaken by officers in terms of consultation with tenants of the community centre and the assistance that the authority had provided to these tenants when searching for alternative accommodation.
- The need for the Council's assets to be managed on a commercial basis as part of ensuring that Council services were sustainable moving forward.
- The condition of the community centre building and the fact that tenants had approached the Council about the property's state of disrepair.
- The meanwhile lease arrangements that, although supposed to be temporary, had been in place for many of the VCS organisations for a number of years.
- The potential risk that a deferral on this decision would result in further deterioration in the condition of the property.

On the basis of these points, the Executive Committee rejected the recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on this subject.

Members subsequently discussed the report further and in doing so questioned whether the condition of the building might represent a health and safety risk for visitors. Officers explained that the building was safe for people to use in its current form. The intention of the proposal detailed in the report was to ensure that the asset was fit for purpose moving forward.

Reference was made to the availability of a significant number of meanwhile use lease arrangements for the community centre on Easemore Road and a number of other Council owned assets in the Borough. Officers confirmed that there were a number of historic arrangements in place which needed to be reviewed as the Council increasingly needed to operate in a more commercial manner in order to remain sustainable. There were alternative options available to VCS groups, including potentially accommodation in the REDI Centre and the Council was working closely with VCS groups to help them to explore these options.

Consideration was given to the ongoing work on stock condition surveys and the approach that had been adopted to this work by the Council. Members were advised that the Council was prioritising stock condition surveys for properties in a poor state of repair and / or assets that the authority could potentially utilise differently to maximise commercial opportunities. An Asset Strategy was in the process of being developed for the Council and

the external organisation, Savills, had identified assets that the Council might want to survey at an earlier stage as part of this process.

RESOLVED that

the existing Community House building and associated land in Easemore Road (rear of No. 103), be declared surplus to Council requirements and disposed of at market value.

25. FUTURE USE OF THE TOWN HALL AND CUSTOMER ACCESS

The Interim Section 151 Officer presented a report detailing proposals on future use of the Town Hall and customer access to services. The Executive Committee was informed that the report was proposing that the cashiers' desk at the Town Hall should be closed and was requesting authority for officers to hire out space in the Town Hall to external organisations.

In reviewing the cashiers' desk, consideration had been given to data in terms of demand for the services of the cashiers during two weeks in March 2022. In this period, there had been a total of 202 customers using the cashiers' services at the Town Hall. As requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Officers had subsequently reviewed the data for use of the cashiers' services between March and June 2022. The data during this period revealed a very slight increase in demand but the trend remained comparable to the data that had been included in the report.

The Executive Committee was advised that there were a number of alternative face-to-face payment options available to customers outside the Town Hall. In total, 46 such payment options had been identified in the Borough. Should there be agreement to close the cashiers' desk, Officers would work with customers to encourage them to use alternative payment methods. Lessons had been learned from the previous closure of the One Stop Shops in the District Centres as well as from access arrangements when the Town Hall had been closed during the Covid-19 lockdowns and this would inform arrangements moving forward. Customers would continue to be able to access self-service telephones and free wifi in the reception area at the Town Hall, which customers could use to obtain advice and make payments on their personal devices.

The option to hire out office space in the Town Hall had been identified as an opportunity for the Council. Customers would benefit from this approach as it would help to ensure that a number of key public services could be accessed by residents at the same central location. The Council would also benefit, as this would result in the authority receiving additional rental income.

During consideration of this item, Members noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had pre-scrutinised the report at a meeting held on 7th July 2022. After a detailed debate of the subject, the Committee had endorsed the recommendations in the report. The Executive Committee noted the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's support for the proposals and thanked the Committee for debating the subject in detail.

The Executive Committee subsequently discussed the report in detail and in doing so questioned whether there would be any redundancies arising from the closure of the cashiers' desk. Members were advised that staff would be redeployed and there would be no redundancies. The Council was keen to retain staff at a challenging time in terms of recruitment to local government.

Reference was made to the services that would remain available for the public to access in reception at the Town Hall. Officers confirmed that residents would still be able to hand in paperwork at reception or to provide proof of ID where necessary for accessing certain Council services. During the three months prior to the closure of the cashiers' service, officers would monitor the types of issues raised by customers visiting the cashiers to ensure that the needs of residents continued to be met moving forward.

Consideration was also given to the proposals to hire out space in the Town Hall to external organisations. Members commented that, following the Covid-19 pandemic, there remained a significant amount of office space in the Town Hall that was not being used so this proposal represented a sensible suggestion on maximising use of the space moving forward. In addition, Members commented that this would have a beneficial impact on the Council's budget.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Closure of the Cashiers Service on the 30th September 2022 be approved;**
- 2) the alternatives for Customers to make payments and the training and guidance that will take place up to the closure date be noted;**
- 3) the proposals to sublet parts of the Town Hall be approved; and**
- 4) authority be delegated to the Head of Legal Democratic and Property Services and the Section 151 Officer following consultation with the Leader to negotiate terms**

and enter into the lease arrangements necessary to enable resolution 3 above.

26. QUARTERLY RISK UPDATE

The Interim Section 151 Officer presented the quarterly risk update for the Executive Committee's consideration.

Members were informed that there had been an audit of the Council's risk management arrangements in 2018/19 which had resulted in some recommendations being made. Some action had been taken in response to the audit findings but, when the Internal Audit team completed a follow up audit, it had been concluded that some actions had not yet been fully completed. In March 2022, the Corporate Management Team (CMT) had reviewed risk management arrangements further and, whilst some examples of good practice had been identified, it was felt that effective risk management needed to be led by senior officers and embedded in the authority. Officers had been appointed on behalf of each department as risk champions to help with this process moving forward.

Risk monitoring reports were due to be presented for the consideration of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee during the year. Due to the time that had elapsed since the previous update to Members concerning risks, Officers had concluded it would be appropriate to present a report on this subject to the Executive Committee prior to the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee on this occasion. In future, updates to the Executive Committee would follow after the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee had had a chance to consider the subject.

The Executive Committee was advised that, in order for a risk to be classified as a corporate risk rather than a departmental risk, it needed to have the potential to result in significant damage. When the report had originally been drafted there had been 119 departmental risks identified for the authority. By the date of the meeting, this had reduced to 96 departmental risks.

Following the presentation of the report, the Executive Committee discussed the need for elected Members to be kept informed of the Council's risk management arrangements on an ongoing basis. The role of the Risk Champion on the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee would also help to ensure that Members remained apprised of risk management arrangements moving forward.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the definition of a Corporate Risk be approved;**
- 2) the present list of Corporate Risks be approved;**
- 3) the use of the Risk Management Framework devised by Zurich be approved; and**
- 4) the progress made on the Action Plan approved by CMT on the 16th March 2022 be noted.**

27. FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

The Interim Section 151 Officer presented a report detailing the Council's planned approach to financial monitoring in the 2022/23 financial year.

The Executive Committee was informed that financial monitoring reports would be presented on a regular basis for the consideration of Members. The reports would incorporate information about a full suite of financial indicators. The reports would also contain red, amber and green (RAG) ratings for the indicators and would include comparative data in relation to the previous period.

The Council had a revenue budget of £10.5 million and a capital budget of £4.5 million. There was also capital funding which had been carried over from 2020-2021, when many capital projects had been postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, the Council, as the accountable body, was in receipt of over £15 million Town's Funding, which could only be used on specific projects for the redevelopment of Redditch town centre.

The Council had a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which detailed the authority's anticipated financial position over the following three year period. Should no action be taken, the Council's balances were projected to fall to just over £200,000, which was lower than the minimum levels considered acceptable for the Council. To ensure that the Council had a balanced budget moving forward, action would need to be taken to achieve £1.5 million savings over the full three-year period of the plan. The Government had indicated that Councils would be receiving a two-year settlement in December 2022, although it was unlikely that this would help to cover the full gap in the budget.

To address the anticipated issues within the MTFP, work had already commenced on organisational business plans and reviews of the base budget. The Interim Section 151 Officer had already held discussions with four Heads of Service about potential

opportunities to achieve savings or secure additional income in their departments. Heads of Service were giving consideration to changes that could be made to service delivery in light of lessons learned and opportunities created during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed the significant level of savings that would need to be achieved over the three years of the MTFP. Members were advised that some difficult decisions would need to be taken in order to achieve a balanced budget position moving forward. All the services that were delivered by the Council were important but if all services provided by the Council continued to be delivered in the same manner as at present the authority would not be financially sustainable moving forward. There would be a number of ideas explored by Officers before a draft budget was presented to the Executive Committee in the autumn, in which options would be presented for Members' consideration. Consideration would also be given to the contribution that District and Borough Councils made to health prevention work and the potential for alternative sources of funding to be provided to support the authority's delivery of these services. The draft budget position would then be subject to public consultation before a final set of budget proposals was presented in January/February 2023.

Reference was made to the Covid grant funding that the Council had received from the Government during the pandemic and the extent to which this had been utilised to date. Officers clarified that some, but not all, of this funding had already been allocated. Officers were also reviewing potential options available to the Council in respect of Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates (NDR) arrears.

RESOLVED

- 1) to note that future monitoring returns will be in the "on system" format;**
- 2) to approve the approach being taken by Officers to balance the 2022/23 budget and future years budget deficit positions; and**
- 3) to approve the addition to the monitoring report of the additional financial health indicators.**

28. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair confirmed that all of the recommendations detailed in the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on

9th June 2022 had been considered by the Executive Committee at a previous meeting.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 9th June 2022 be noted.

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

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

30. 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

The Executive Committee was informed that there had been no meetings of the Climate Change Working Group since the previous meeting of the Executive Committee.

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

Councillor Dormer explained that the latest meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Party had had to be rescheduled due to a clash with other Committee meetings in July. The meeting would be rescheduled to take place in September 2022.

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

The Executive Committee was advised that the latest meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board had taken place earlier that day. A comprehensive update about the meeting would be provided at the following meeting of the Executive Committee.

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

Members were informed that the latest meeting of the Member Support Steering Group had needed to be rescheduled due to

a clash with additional Committee meetings being held in July. The meeting would be rescheduled to take place in September 2022.

e) Planning Advisory Panel – Chair, Councillor Matthew Dormer

Councillor Dormer confirmed that there had been no meetings of the Planning Advisory Panel since the previous meeting of the Executive Committee.

31. DISPOSAL OF LAND - ST GREGORY'S CHURCH

The Principal Solicitor presented a report on the subject of the disposal of land adjacent to the former St Gregory's Church at Winyates Way / Woodcote Close, Redditch.

The disposal of the land would enable the Council to help facilitate a development on adjacent land. Access would be provided to the development from the land that would be disposed of by the Council. The proposed development would be a mixture of social housing and housing available to rent. The housing would be developed by Redditch Co-operative Homes and GreenSquareAccord, which would be developing housing that included high levels of insulation and use of solar power and which was therefore considered an exemplar of low carbon housing.

Members welcomed the proposals detailed in the report and in so doing commented on the benefits that the development would have on the local community. Concerns were raised that the former St Gregory's Church had attracted a lot of anti-social behaviour (ASB) in recent years and the proposed development would help to discourage this moving forward.

RESOLVED that

- 1) authority be delegated to the Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services to negotiate and finalise terms for the sale of Council owned land and in return for the capital sum; and**

RECOMMENDED that:-

- 2) the Council's budget be augmented by the capital receipt.**

Executive

Committee

Tuesday, 12th July, 2022

and closed at 7.17 pm