



Council

Monday, 14th November,
2022

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Ann Isherwood, Tom Baker-Price, Imran Altaf, Karen Ashley, Joe Baker, Juliet Barker Smith, Joanne Beecham, Juliet Brunner, Michael Chalk, Brandon Clayton, Luke Court, Matthew Dormer, Peter Fleming, Andrew Fry, Lucy Harrison, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Joanna Kane, Sid Khan, Anthony Lovell, Emma Marshall, Timothy Pearman, David Thain and Craig Warhurst

Also Present:

Dr Anita Sharma-James (Motor Neuron Disease Association)

Officers:

Peter Carpenter, Kevin Dicks, Claire Felton and Sue Hanley

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

50. WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all those present to the meeting.

51. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Salman Akbar, Juma Begum, Alex Fogg, Nyear Nazir and Gareth Prosser.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Sid Khan declared a pecuniary interest in Minute Item No. 61 – Urgent Business – Record of Decisions - in his capacity as a private sector landlord. However, Members were advised that declarations were not required on this occasion as the decision had already been taken and the item was for information only.

53. MINUTES

The Mayor advised that a typographical error had been identified in the minutes, whereby Councillor Juliet Barker Smith had not been

Chair

recorded as present at the meeting when she had been in attendance.

RESOLVED that

subject to the amendment detailed in the preamble above, the minutes of the meeting of Council held on Monday 10th October 2022 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Mayor.

54. ANNOUNCEMENTS

a) The Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor circulated a list of 33 civic engagements that she had attended since the previous meeting of Council (Appendix 1).

The Mayor highlighted the following engagements that had taken place during this period:

- The awards distributed at the children's reading club held on 10th October 2022.
- The Redditch Business Awards evening on 23rd October 2022, which had been the first such event in the town. Members were informed that there had been over 800 nominations.
- The Kingfisher 10k on 30th October, which had been well attended by residents from a range of ages and diverse backgrounds.
- The Remembrance Sunday service on 13th November 2022, which had been well attended.

b) The Leader's Announcements

The Leader advised that since the previous meeting of Council, he had attended meetings of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Board as well as the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP). There had also been a meeting of the young Business Leader's Group at St Augustine's High School.

During consideration of this item, the Leader thanked the Royal British Legion for their hard work organising the Remembrance Sunday commemorations. Members were asked to note that, in addition to the service in Redditch town centre, the event at Astwood Bank had also been well attended.

c) Chief Executive's Announcements

The Chief Executive confirmed that he had no announcements to make on this occasion.

55. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 9)

Two Questions on Notice were considered in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.

Section 106 Funding

Councillor Sharon Harvey asked the Leader the following Question on Notice:

“How much section 106 money has been raised during this financial year, and what current and future projects will this fund?”

The Leader responded by explaining that Section 106 agreements were legal obligations entered into only where it was necessary to mitigate the impacts of a development proposal, to make it acceptable in planning terms. As a result of this criteria, so far during the 2022/23 financial year, no Section 106 agreements had been required to enable the granting of planning permission in the Borough. However, monies had been received during the financial year as a result of the trigger points being met for Section 106 agreements that had been attached to planning permissions granted in earlier financial years.

So far, in the 2022/23 financial year, a total of £115,403.63 had been received by the Council for Section 106 obligations. Specifically, £19,994.47 had been received by the Council to be forwarded to Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust (WAHT) as funding towards acute and planned healthcare services. A further £72,366.04 had been received towards mitigation for open space, play and sports facilities. This would fund projects at Glover Street, Bromsgrove Road, Batchley Pond, Rowan Crescent, Heronfield Close and Petton Close/Costers Lane. In addition, £17,764.32 had been received for improvements to the public realm in Redditch town centre and would contribute to funding of The Canopies project. A further £3,016.80 had been received to cover the cost of providing bins to new dwellings on Edward Street.

There was a £2,262 monitoring fee that had been received to fund the cost of officers monitoring and reporting on Section 106 agreements. Since 2019, there had been a requirement to submit a monitoring report to Government in December each year known as the Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS). The IFS for 2021-22 was in the process of being prepared to be reported in December

and would be uploaded to the Council's website. The IFS for 2020-21 was already available to view on the Council's website.

Additional background information was also provided by the Leader in response to this Question on Notice. This provided the following breakdown in detail for each development project:

- 19/00134/FUL land at Ipsley Street:
 - £6,438.06 for open space at Glover Street.
 - £20,563.16 for play at Glover Street.
 - £8,120.46 for sports at Redditch Cricket, Hockey and Rugby Club.
- 19/01630/FUL St Benedict's Social Club, Rowan Road:
 - £25,927.29 total index link for contributions for open spaces, sport, play and pitches.
 - £4,864.18 (plus index linking) for open spaces and sport at Batchley Pond.
 - £14,488.80 (plus index linking) for play at Rowan Crescent.
 - £3,451.57 (plus index linking) for pitches at Rowan Crescent.
- 20/01060/FUL Land adjacent to Clive Works, Edward Street:
 - Monitoring fee £2,262.
 - Town centre contribution £6,813.08.
 - Waste and recycling contribution - £3,016.80 – to fund the cost of providing bins to the new dwellings
- 20/00044/FUL Churchill Medical Centre, Tanhouse Lane:
 - £6,619.88 open spaces at Heronfield Close play area.
 - £4,697.19 pitches at Petton Close / Costers Lane.
 - £10,951.24 town centre public realm improvements to Market Place/Church Green.
 - Also £19,994.47 for Worcestershire NHS trust to be applied towards acute and planned healthcare.

Councillor Harvey subsequently asked the following supplementary question:

“A few months ago, it was reported that Section 106 money might be a useful funding stream to support bus services. Would you consider putting this forward for bus services in the future?”

The Leader answered this question by commenting that Section 106 funding agreements were considered on a case-by-case basis in relation to planning applications. Should a request be received from local bus operators for Section 106 funding in relation to a planning application, and should this request be considered relevant to the application, then this could potentially occur.

Section 24 Notice – Finance System

Councillor Joe Baker asked the Leader the following Question on Notice:

“Now that the controlling group has led us into another section 24 notice. Can the leader explain why measures were not in place to ensure if the new system failed that our accounts would still run smoothly with an implemented back up plan to enable the audit was done on time?”

The Leader responded by commenting that the Council’s previous financial system and cash receipting system were both at the end of their useful lives in 2018. A tender process had been undertaken for the delivery of a replacement System and Tech1 were the successful bidder via a Crown Commercial Services (CCS) G Cloud mini competition process.

Any replacement of a Council’s financial system was a complicated process, so a programme team was established to ensure an implementation plan was timetabled and delivered.

It had not been possible to dual run an implementation of a financial system alongside an older system; there had to be full transfer on a set date to the new financial system. For the transfer from the old to the new system to take place, a “go live” checklist needed to be completed to the appropriate standard. This included months of testing of the configuration in various scenarios. In the period just before the transfer date, a process was then followed to copy the data as at that date from the old system to the new system. Members were asked to note that the majority of this process was run remotely as the Council was operating under Covid-19 restrictions for much of the implementation period, which was a new way of working for everyone.

Initially, the finance part of the system, not HR and Payroll, was due to go live in the Autumn of 2020 but the “go live” checklist was not approved as completed to the appropriate standard by the board and so the implementation was delayed until 8th February 2021. At this time, the programme team approved the checklist and agreed that it had been completed to the appropriate standard and the system went live.

After implementation on the 8th February 2021, there was another important factor in the delivery of the financial system to a steady state. For various reasons, all of the Corporate Finance Team left the organisation. This meant that a new team needed to be recruited. The Council were not successful with the process in the autumn of 2021 and only three new staff joined at that time.

However, following the campaign in the spring of 2022, another 10 staff were recruited. This meant that by August 2022, the Council were back to a working establishment of Finance staff. It should be noted that in this period there had been an acute issue in availability of finance staff both for Councils and for Auditors. It would have been impossible to deliver a full set of accounts without a finance team in place, whatever the Council's finance system.

The system was working in all aspects apart from cash receipting, and Members were advised that the Council was the only implementer to date of the Tech1 cash receipting solution (alongside Bromsgrove District Council). Significant work had been undertaken by both the Council and Tech1 to correct this over the previous four months and the final corrections went live over the weekend of the 5th and 6th November 2022.

Members were asked to note that 2020 and 2021 were years when the Council was subject to Covid-19 restrictions. During this period, the Council delivered Covid-19 support to its stakeholders and completed all the associated assurance requirements for the Government for the additional support granted.

The Leader concluded by commenting that, once the Council made the decision to go live with a new system it had to move to using that system and there could be no parallel running. The authority had undertaken new system implementation during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic and, following the launch of the system, lost the Corporate Finance Team that would have taken the system through to steady state running. This would have been the team that undertook the corrections of defects/errors and delivered the financial statements. Now that the team was up to capacity and the system could be fully supported, the Council had resolved the cash receipting issues and were moving to provide draft 2020/21 accounts by the end of November 2022.

Councillor Joe Baker subsequently asked the following supplementary question:

“Now that the Section 24 Notice is in place and given the Leader implemented an untested finance system, will he and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling apologise for the embarrassment this has caused to the Council?”

The Leader replied by commenting that nobody could have foreseen the combination of factors that contributed to the delays in submitting the Council's 2020-21 accounts. The Council had been open and transparent about the causes and a lot of work had been undertaken to address this. There was also no option to run different finance systems in parallel meaning that the Council could

not fall back on the earlier system. In this context, the Leader advised that he did not feel that anybody needed to apologise.

56. MOTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 11)

The Mayor advised that two Motions on Notice had been received prior to the Council meeting.

Bulky Waste Collection

Councillor Sid Khan submitted the following Motion on Notice for Members' consideration:

“Council is concerned about the cost-of-living crisis having a new impact on fly tipping, with the cost of bulky waste collection becoming a disincentive for many residents. Council calls upon the Head of Environmental Services to bring a report to the Executive, to consider the costs, consequences and benefits of a pre-booked, free household bulky waste collection service for those Redditch residents who are low paid, elderly, disabled or in receipt of benefits, which will enable Members to consider options and determine what action, if any, to take.”

The Motion was proposed by Councillor Sid Khan and seconded by Councillor Sharon Harvey.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Khan commented that by approving the Motion, Members would help to reduce the levels of fly tipping in the Borough. The Motion would also support efforts to address the green thread, which was one of the key priorities for the authority in the Council Plan. A similar Motion had recently been considered at a Council meeting at Worcestershire County Council, although that had requested a free Bulky Waste Collection service. By contrast, the Motion that Councillor Khan had submitted was requesting that the matter be investigated further by Officers, who could subsequently present a report on the subject at a meeting of the Executive Committee. There were a number of other Councils in the country, including Reading Borough Council, which had already made allowances for the provision of free bulky waste collection services, which demonstrated that this was possible to implement.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Harvey commented that the Motion was being proposed at a time of a cost of living crisis. Many residents, particularly those who were vulnerable or on low incomes, would struggle to pay for a bulky waste collection service, even when they had items that needed to be collected. A free service for residents in this position would help them to dispose of domestic goods. The Motion called for the potential provision of a

free bulky waste collection service to be investigated further and reported back to the Executive Committee.

Members subsequently discussed the Motion and in so doing noted that the Council had a duty to provide a bulky waste collection service. Some Members questioned whether a free bulky waste collection service would deter certain residents and unscrupulous businesses from fly tipping.

Reference was made to the businesses that offered to collect bulky waste items, both from households and from companies. Members commented that many of these companies were reputable and disposed of goods in an appropriate manner. However, there were also disreputable companies that charged to collect items and then resorted to fly tipping to dispose of those items. It was suggested that the activities of these businesses should be investigated further.

Consideration was also given to the costs involved in facilitating a bulky waste collection service. Members noted that the Council was already subsidising the service and a free service would cost the Council more to support. Fly tipping could not be eradicated altogether but action was already being taken to address fly tipping; Members were asked to note that reports of fly tipping had declined in 2022 compared to 2021. However, concerns were also raised that many residents might struggle to pay for a bulky waste collection service at a time of rising inflation and therefore might conclude that they had no alternative but to take part in fly tipping domestic goods. The suggestion was made that, if there were concerns about the potential financial costs to the Council involved in providing a free bulky waste collection service, this could be trialled for a short period and the costs could subsequently be assessed.

During consideration of this item, the Leader proposed an amendment to the Motion. The amended Motion was worded in the following way:

“Council is concerned about the cost-of-living crisis having a new impact on fly tipping, with the cost of bulky waste collection becoming a disincentive for many residents. Council asks the *Overview and Scrutiny Committee to set up a Task and Finish review*, to consider the costs, consequences and benefits of a pre-booked, free household bulky waste collection service for those Redditch residents who are low paid, elderly, disabled or in receipt of benefits, which will enable Members to consider options and determine what action, if any, to take.”

The amendment was proposed by Councillor Matthew Dormer and seconded by Councillor Karen Ashley.

In proposing the amendment, Councillor Dormer commented that a Task Group could investigate various arrangements that could be put in place for the delivery of bulky waste collection services and could bring forward recommendations on this subject that had an evidence basis. Members were also asked to note that a Task Group could investigate the enforcement powers available to the Council to address fly tipping.

Consideration was subsequently given to the proposal to launch a Task Group investigation into the subject of fly tipping. On the one hand, Members commented that a Task Group investigation would involve elected Members, rather than Officers, reviewing the subject in detail. On the other hand, concerns were raised that there was already one Task Group due to launch and another waiting to start and it was suggested that a review of this subject was too urgent to wait. Indeed, Members commented that, should the amendment be agreed, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be asked to consider the proposal to launch a Task Group exercise at the following scheduled meeting of the Committee on 1st December 2022.

At the end of these discussions, Councillor Khan, as the proposer of the original Motion, confirmed that he would be happy to accept the amendment to the wording of the Motion.

RESOLVED that

Council is concerned about the cost-of-living crisis having a new impact on fly tipping, with the cost of bulky waste collection becoming a disincentive for many residents.

Council asks the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to set up a Task and Finish review, to consider the costs, consequences and benefits of a pre-booked, free household bulky waste collection service for those Redditch residents who are low paid, elderly, disabled or in receipt of benefits, which will enable Members to consider options and determine what action, if any, to take.

Motor Neurone Disease Charter

Councillor Joanna Kane submitted the following Motion on Notice for Members' consideration:

“That this Council adopts the Motor Neurone Disease Charter in support of local people living with this terminal disease and their carers.

The aim of adopting the Charter is to promote awareness and understanding of Motor Neurone Disease among elected members and staff. This will help to provide people with MND, their carers and families with appropriate support or signpost them to relevant services."

The Motion was proposed by Councillor Kane and seconded by Councillor Juliet Barker Smith.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Kane commented that she had brought the Motion forward following a discussion with a local resident who had informed her that adopting the charter would make a big difference to people living with Motor Neurone Disease and their carers. Councillor Khan thanked Dr Anita Sharma-James, Chairman of the Worcestershire branch of the Motor Neurone Disease Association, who had provided valuable information and advice.

Council was informed that Motor Neurone Disease was a rapidly progressing disease, which had no cure and was unfortunately always fatal. The disease attacked a person's nerve endings and made it impossible for the brain to send signals to the muscles. People with Motor Neurone Disease ended up living in a shell of a body, unable to move, communicate or look after themselves and eventually became unable to breathe.

Motor Neurone Disease was difficult to diagnose, and this could typically take between nine months to a year. As a result, life expectancy after diagnosis could be very short, with one third of people dying within 12 months of a diagnosis. This short life expectancy was one of the reasons why it was so important that elected Members and frontline staff had a clear understanding of how to improve the quality of life of people living with the disease as well as their carers. In addition, because the disease progressed so rapidly, it was essential that people living with Motor Neurone Disease received adaptations to their homes as quickly and as easily as possible. The Council had an important role here, particularly in terms of supporting Council tenants with the disease.

The Motor Neurone Disease charter called for five simple rights:

- Early diagnosis and information.
- Access to quality care and treatment.
- To be treated as individuals with dignity and respect.
- The right to maximise their quality of life.
- The right for carers to be valued, respected, listened to and well supported.

Adopting the charter would send a clear message to the public that Redditch Borough Council was supportive of these five rights. If the Council agreed to adopt the charter, Redditch Borough Council would be joining 96 other local authorities, including Bromsgrove District Council, Wyre Forest District Council and Worcestershire County Council. Adopting the charter would also enable the Council to work more closely with the Motor Neurone Disease Association, which could provide support to complement the work of the authority. For example, the charity could provide information for Members and Officers about what it was like to live with Motor Neurone Disease and could also arrange both training and speakers for events.

Members were asked to note that, in Worcestershire it was estimated that there were 100 people living with Motor Neurone Disease. One in 300 people were likely to develop Motor Neurone Disease during their lifetimes. In total, six people died every day from the disease.

Councillor Kane concluded by commenting that it was vitally important that people living with the disease were able to access rapid support when they needed it, due to the quick progression of the illness. People living with the condition could quickly reach a point, post diagnosis, where they could not speak, swallow or move. In this context, the Council's support for the charter would be invaluable.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Barker Smith commented that she had been keen to second the Motion as Motor Neurone Disease was an illness that was of particular interest and concern to her. Members were reminded that Professor Stephen Hawking, the late Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at the University of Cambridge, had been diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease early in his career and had relied on advances in technology to communicate with people as the illness progressed. The husband of a friend of Councillor Barker Smith had also been diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease but, whilst her friend had recorded his speech, he had not been able to access the same advanced technology and he had struggled to communicate before he sadly died from the disease.

In responding to the Motion, the Leader commented that by adopting the Motion and supporting the charter, the Council could help to raise awareness of the disease and its impact on those in the local community who were affected by it. The Council would, in line with the aim of the charter, endeavour to raise awareness and understanding of Motor Neurone Disease through the development of a dedicated page on the Council's website. Action would also be taken to create a Motor Neurone Disease Charter page on the

website, which would explain what the charter was and provide links to the Association's website. That website was a comprehensive resource that provided easy access to further advice and support, which was available through the Association and its local branches.

Members subsequently discussed the Motion in detail and in doing so commented that, as with any diagnosis of a terminal illness, people with Motor Neurone Disease could experience fear and isolation. Reference was made to the relatively recent diagnosis of the former England Rugby International player, Mr Rob Burrows MBE, as well as the coverage of his diagnosis and the progression of his illness by the BBC Breakfast News service, which had helped to raise awareness nationally of the disease.

Reference was made by Members to their personal experiences of Motor Neurone Disease, including family members who had been diagnosed with the illness as well as Members who had cared for people with the disease during their careers. Members thanked Councillor Kane for submitting the Motion and for raising awareness of the charter at the Council meeting in a sensitive manner.

During consideration of this item, Dr Anita Sharma-James, from the Motor Neurone Disease Association, who was in attendance at the meeting, was invited to address Council. In speaking on the matter, Dr Anita Sharma-James thanked Members for their kind words and explained that she too had had personal experience of a close member of her family receiving a diagnosis of Motor Neurone Disease. The Motor Neurone Disease Association raised funding and provided support to people living with Motor Neurone Disease, their carers, social services departments and to Councils. Members were advised that carers were particularly important to people with Motor Neurone Disease and they had often been the only people to maintain contact with those who had been diagnosed with the disease throughout the Covid-19 lockdowns.

RESOLVED that

this Council adopts the Motor Neurone Disease Charter in support of local people living with this terminal disease and their carers.

The aim of adopting the Charter is to promote awareness and understanding of Motor Neurone Disease among elected members and staff. This will help to provide people with MND, their carers and families with appropriate support or signpost them to relevant services.

(At the end of the debate in respect of this item there was a brief adjournment from 20.14 – 20.20.)

57. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Town Hall Hub

The Leader of the Council presented a report on the subject of the Town Hall Hub. Officers were thanked for their hard work on the report, particularly the Interim Section 151 Officer and the Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services. The report formed part of ongoing work on the regeneration of Redditch town centre.

During consideration of this item, Members raised the following points:

- The length of time that had passed since the Council first started to consider regeneration of Redditch town centre as part of work on the One Public Estate project, which was debated by Council in March 2018.
- The range of public services that would be accommodated in the Town Hall Hub.
- The extent to which it would be appropriate for the central library in Redditch to relocate to Redditch Town Hall to form part of the Hub.
- The level of public support in the local community for the relocation of the library to Redditch Town Hall.
- The consultation that had already been undertaken by Redditch Borough Council in respect of proposals for the regeneration of the town. Members commented that public consultation had taken place in 2020/21, although the forms of consultation available at that time had been restricted by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The public consultation that was in the process of being undertaken by Worcestershire County Council as the lead authority responsible for the provision of Library Services.
- The potential for there to be a vibrant public sector hub without the library being moved into the Town Hall.
- The risks to the Council involved in working on the project, including the relocation of the library.
- The potential challenges for the Council, in terms of the external auditor's expectations following the issuing of the Section 24 Notice, should the works at the Town Hall fail to be delivered on time and on budget. Members were reminded that the Section 24 Notice related to the non-submission of the Council's 2020-21 accounts and not to financial sustainability.
- The fact that the introduction of a public sector hub in the Town Hall formed part of the regeneration plans for the town,

which also included redevelopment of the railway quarter and establishing an innovation hub.

- The impact that the relocation of the library might have on the area in the town centre where the existing library was located.
- The extent to which the Council and partner organisations would be able to attract businesses, including restaurants, to the public square area that would be created as part of the plans, should the library be relocated.
- The disposal of Council assets and whether this had the support of the public.
- The benefits to residents arising from the NHS and Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) renting space in the Town Hall.
- The future location of the Redditch archives should the library be relocated into Redditch Town Hall.
- The condition of the current building in which the central Redditch library was based.
- The fact that there was no guarantee that the relocation of the library to Redditch Town Hall would occur as this was subject to consultation.
- The reasons why Worcestershire County Council would not pay rent for a period of time to Redditch Borough Council for space in the Town Hall for the library, should the relocation proceed. Members were advised that Worcestershire County Council would benefit from a rent-free period because Redditch Borough Council was asking for control of a separate building in return.
- The petition that had been submitted to Worcestershire County Council in relation to the relocation of the library.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 17.5 a recorded vote was taken and the voting was as follows:

Members voting FOR the resolution:

Councillors Imran Altaf, Karen Ashley, Tom Baker-Price, Joanne Beecham, Brandon Clayton, Luke Court, Matthew Dormer, Peter Fleming, Lucy Harrison, Anthony Lovell, Emma Marshall, Timothy Pearman and Craig Warhurst (13).

Members voting AGAINST the resolution:

Councillors Joe Baker, Juliet Barker Smith, Andrew Fry, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Joanna Kane and Sid Khan (7).

Members voting to ABSTAIN on the resolution:

Councillors Juliet Brunner, Ann Isherwood and David Thain (3).

The vote on the resolution was therefore carried.

(Prior to the vote in respect of this matter, Councillor Michael Chalk left the room and so was not present when the recorded vote was taken.)

Climate Change Strategy / Carbon Reduction Implementation Plan

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change presented the Climate Change Strategy and Carbon Reduction Implementation Plan for Members' consideration. Council was informed that climate change impacted on everyone and was increasingly evident, including through the excessively hot summer that there had been in the UK in 2022. The Council was only one organisation among many in the Borough responsible for carbon emissions and could not control how other groups and individuals behaved, although it could contribute to reductions in emissions as well as set a positive example. Action was needed urgently to tackle climate change, which was already having a negative impact on biodiversity. The Climate Change Cross Party Working Group had discussed the content of the strategy and Members had had a chance to contribute their suggestions as part of this process.

Members were asked to note that there had been carbon literacy training provided to Members and staff earlier in the year. This accredited training had been very informative and the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change recommended that those Members who had not had a chance to do so should attend climate change training when a further opportunity arose.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed a number of points in detail:

- The potential for the Council to be more ambitious about tackling climate change.
- The debate in respect of the item that had taken place at a recent meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at which Members had made suggestions about potential changes that could be made to the Local Plan to encourage developers to build more energy efficient properties. Whilst recommendations on this subject had not been agreed by the Committee, it was noted that Members could influence the content of the Local Plan by participating in meetings of the Planning Advisory Panel (PAP).
- The fact that the Climate Change Strategy represented a starting point that would help the authority to work towards becoming carbon neutral.
- The frequency with which meetings of the Climate Change Cross Party Working Group had taken place. Members noted that four meetings of the group took place each year and three

meetings of the group had already taken place in 2022 with a further meeting due to take place in December.

- The extent to which it would be possible to arrange for meetings of the Climate Change Cross Party Working Group to take place in public.
- The timing of the report which was being considered at the same time that the COP27 summit, dedicated at an international level to tackling climate change, was occurring in Sharm El-Sheik, Egypt.
- The work that had already been undertaken at the Council to reduce carbon emissions in the Borough, including through the installation of solar panels on various Council owned properties and the upgrading of the windows and insulation in the Town Hall.
- The Council's carbon reduction plans in terms of how these compared to other Councils in the region. Members commented that the Council's actions and strategy compared favourably to those in place at many other local authorities.
- The need for appropriate measures to be in place for tackling carbon emissions so that Members could monitor progress.
- The potential for Redditch to have a greener, digital economy moving forward and the positive impact that this could have on carbon emissions in the Borough.
- The many trees in the Borough which made a positive contribution to tackling CO² emissions and the benefits arising from planting more trees.

Voluntary Bodies Scheme

The Leader presented the Voluntary Bodies Scheme for Members' consideration. Council was advised that the report had been drafted following consultation with Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations concerning the various options available to support the sector moving forward. The option that had been proposed was in line with the feedback that had been received from VCS groups.

Members discussed the options in the report and in so doing made reference to the fact that support for concessionary rents would be withdrawn under the proposals that had been put forward. Concerns were raised about the impact that the withdrawal of concessionary rent support could have on some VCS groups and questions were raised about the extent to which the sector would be supportive of this measure.

Reference was made to discussions that had been held at a recent meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee when the report had been pre-scrutinised. At this meeting, it had been made clear that, whilst there was cross party consensus amongst Members

about the benefits of moving to a system of two types of grant application depending on the size of the funding requested, this consensus did not extend to the removal of support for concessionary rents. Instead, some Members asked for it to be noted that they were opposed to the removal of the concessionary rents support.

Consideration was given to the fact that Redditch Borough Council was one of a small number of local authorities that still provided grant support to VCS organisations. This was something that Members agreed the Council could be proud of moving forward.

Fees and Charges 2023/24

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Fees and Charges 2023/24 report for Council's consideration.

Members discussed the proposed changes to the Council's fees and charges and in so doing noted that there would be a 10 per cent increase to most fees and charges under the proposals. Increases at this level corresponded with the level of inflation on the date of the Council meeting and would help to ensure that the authority could secure full cost recovery for service delivery.

Concerns were raised that people on low incomes might struggle to pay for Council services given the proposed increases. However, Members also noted that there was a need to manage the Council's finances in a sustainable manner and this would be best achieved through securing full cost recovery where possible.

During consideration of this item, the following areas were queried:

- The commentary for the fees recorded for replacement pendants and for key safes for the Lifeline service and the reasons why the basis for calculating this had changed from actual cost plus a 17 per cent administrative fee to full cost recovery.
- The service charges that had been recorded for the three storey flats, the Woodrow Estate, Evesham Mews and the communal blocks and the reasons why these fees were set to achieve full cost recovery rather than being a fixed fee.
- The heating charges recorded for Bredon House, Mendip House and Malvern House, the reasons why these were set at full cost recovery rather than a fixed price and the regularity with which tenants needed to pay these charges. Members were advised that the Council had moved to achieving full cost recovery for these charges in 2021/22.

Council was informed that further information would be provided to Members in response to these questions outside the meeting.

Reference was made to the fact that many fees had been increased in order to achieve full cost recovery. Questions were raised about what this meant in practice and Members suggested that it would have been useful for examples to be provided. Concerns were also raised about the proposed 35 per cent increases to fees for the Dial a Ride and Shopmobility services and the extent to which the new charges would be affordable for customers. However, Members also commented that the Council could not subsidise all services and, wherever possible, the costs of service delivery needed to be covered in order to ensure that they remained sustainable.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meetings of the Executive Committee held on 11th October and 25th October 2022 be received and all recommendations adopted.

58. REGULATORY COMMITTEES

Section 24 Notice

Council considered the Section 24 Notice that had been issued to the authority by the external auditors, Grant Thornton. Members agreed that the Council should accept the Section 24 Notice and the points that the external auditors had raised in this notice, which related to the non-submission of the Council's 2020-21 accounts.

Reference was made to discussions that had taken place at a meeting of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee held on 10th November 2022 in respect of this matter. During this meeting, Members had been advised that there were three key factors which had contributed to the delays in submitting the accounts:

- Problems with the implementation of the new Tech1 finance system, particularly the cash receipting part of this system, which had been introduced at the Council in 2021.
- Significant staff turnover in the Corporate Financial Services department at the time when the new system was being introduced.
- The Covid-19 pandemic.

Consideration was given to the hard work that had been undertaken by officers to rectify problems with the Tech1 system, once new staff had been appointed to the Financial Services team. Members thanked Officers for their hard work and expressed their hopes that

the action that had already been taken would enable the Council to return to submitting accounts in a timely manner in future.

Members noted that the external auditors had indicated at the meeting of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee that the Council might need to pay an additional fee for the audit of the 2020-21 accounts once these were submitted, depending on the amount of work required. Questions were raised about how much this additional fee was likely to cost the Council. The Interim Section 151 Officer explained that the additional fee would depend on the level of extra work required from the external auditors to audit the accounts, but it was likely this could be approximately £20,000.

The additional training in respect of the Tech1 finance system that was due to be provided to staff was also discussed. Members queried the length of time that would be required to deliver this training to staff as well as the financial costs. The Interim Section 151 Officer explained that there would be a two-day training session held between the completion of the 2020-21 accounts and start of work on the 2021-22 accounts. This training would be in addition to the general expenditure training which had been provided to staff on an ongoing basis.

Concerns were raised about the delay in submitting the Council's 2020-21 accounts and Officers were asked to clarify whether the authority's 2019/20 accounts had been submitted and whether the delays with the 2020-21 accounts would impact on submission of the 2021-22 accounts. The Interim Section 151 Officer explained that the Council's 2019-20 accounts had already been submitted. Councils could only work on one set of accounts at a time, so the 2021-22 accounts had not yet been started. However, as soon as work on the 2020-21 accounts had been completed, Officers would commence work on the 2021-22 accounts. The problems with the cash receipting part of the system had been resolved and Officers were on track to submit the 2020-21 accounts by the end of November 2022 and for this reason, there would need to be an extra meeting of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee in December to consider the statement of accounts.

During consideration of this item, Members noted that the Council had been transparent in terms of reporting on the issues that had been identified by the external auditors in both the Section 24 Notice and the Interim External Auditor's Annual Report 2020-21. In addition, Members had discussed the introduction and roll out of the new Tech1 finance system at various meetings, including at meetings of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group.

The impact that the Section 24 Notice had had on staff morale and mental wellbeing was briefly considered. Members commented that staff welfare needed to be prioritised and with this in mind suggested that a sense of isolation arising from working at home could have a negative impact on some staff. Concerns were also raised that the Section 24 Notice could encourage more staff to leave the authority. However, it was also noted that the Council had an agile working policy and this provided flexibility over working arrangements to suit the needs of both the employer and employees.

Interim External Auditor's Annual Report 2020-21

Members considered the Interim External Auditor's Annual Report 2020-21. Reference was made to the recent discussions with respect to this report at a meeting of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee and Members noted that the external auditors had made recommendations that were designed to improve various processes at the Council. In particular, the key recommendations in the report focused on the need for transparency in financial monitoring and reporting arrangements.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Section 24 Statutory Recommendation is accepted and that Council endorse the actions included in the management responses which form the rectification process required as per legislation;**
- 2) the 6 Key Recommendations and 13 Improvement Recommendations within the Interim External Auditor's Annual Report 2020-21 be agreed; and**
- 3) it be agreed that the Management Actions contained within the Interim External Auditor's Annual Report 2020-21 will rectify these issues.**

59. URGENT BUSINESS - RECORD OF DECISIONS

The Mayor advised that there had been one urgent decision, on the subject of the implementation of the Energy Efficiency Regulations 2015, since the previous meeting of Council.

60. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

The Mayor explained that she had agreed to receive an item of urgent business for consideration at the meeting, following consultation with the Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer. This urgent business requested a waiver on the six-month rule, for

attendance at Council and Committee meetings, for Councillor Gareth Prosser, due to continuing ill health. The decision was taken to consider this as urgent business as a request to extend the time for non-attendance beyond six months had to be approved at a Council meeting before that six-month period was due to expire and there were no further Council meetings due to take place before Councillor Prosser's six months since last attending a meeting would have passed.

Members considered the report and in doing so expressed their hopes that Councillor Prosser would experience a full recovery soon. In addition, Members commented that their thoughts were with Councillor Prosser and his family at this time.

RESOLVED that

in accordance with Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972, Council approves Councillor Gareth Prosser's non-attendance at meetings until the end of the 2022/23 municipal year on the grounds of continued ill health and that the Council's best wishes be conveyed to him.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 10.13 pm