



# Council

Monday, 30th January, 2023

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## MINUTES

### Present:

Councillor Tom Baker-Price, Salman Akbar, Karen Ashley, Joe Baker, Joanne Beecham, Juma Begum, 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:

Mr James Fardoe

### Officers:

Peter Carpenter, Peter Carpenter, Kevin Dicks and Claire Felton

### Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

### 61. WELCOME

The Deputy Mayor welcomed all those present to the meeting.

### 62. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Juliet Barker Smith, Alex Fogg, Ann Isherwood and Nyear Nazir.

In the absence of the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Tom Baker-Price, chaired the meeting.

### 63. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

### 64. COUNCILLOR GARETH PROSSER

The Deputy Mayor opened this item by leading Members in paying tribute to the late Councillor, Gareth Prosser, by observing a minute's silence.

Chair

The Deputy Mayor subsequently commented on behalf of the Council about Councillor Prosser's years of service as an elected Member. Council was advised that Councillor Prosser had first been elected as a Councillor in 2015 to represent Crabbs Cross ward. He had been appointed Portfolio Holder for Community Safety in 2018/19 and had also served on a number of Committees during his time as a Councillor. In 2020, Councillor Prosser had been appointed the Mayor of the Borough of Redditch during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic and he had been the first Councillor to go on to serve two full consecutive terms of office as Mayor. In addition, Members were reminded that Councillor Prosser's time serving as a Councillor had followed a career serving in the police force. On behalf of Members, the Deputy Mayor commented that Councillor Prosser would be missed.

Members subsequently went on to pay tribute to Councillor Prosser. Reference was made to Councillor Prosser's time serving as a Councillor and Members commented that he had been kind and considerate, with a good sense of humour. Consideration was given to Councillor Prosser's many years as a supporter of Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club and his visits to watch the club play at Molineux Stadium.

Many Members made reference to the length of time that they had known Councillor Prosser, with some having first worked alongside him during his time serving in West Mercia Police. There were also tributes paid to Councillor Prosser's wife and family and Members commented that he had been dedicated to his family and devoted to his grandchildren.

## 65. MINUTES

Members considered the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

During consideration of the minutes, reference was made to Minute Item No. 57 - Executive Committee - specifically the record of the debate in respect of the Voluntary Bodies Scheme report. It was suggested that it should have been noted in the minutes that a Member had asked representatives of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) whether they had been consulted on changes to the concessionary rents scheme and had been advised in response that this had not occurred.

**RESOLVED that,**

**subject to the amendment detailed in the preamble above, the minutes of the Council meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2022 be approved and signed by the Mayor.**

## 66. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following announcements were made:

a) The Mayor's Announcements

The Deputy Mayor advised that a record of the civic engagements that had been attended by the Mayor since the previous meeting had been tabled for Members' consideration (Appendix 1).

b) The Leader's Announcements

The Leader explained that he had attended meetings of the West Midlands Combined Authority's (WMCA's) Economic Growth Board. A Worcestershire District Leaders' Board, comprising the Leaders of the District Councils in Worcestershire only, had been established and the Leader had attended meetings of this board together with meetings of the Worcestershire Leaders' Board, the latter of which also involved the Leader of Worcestershire County Council.

c) The Chief Executive's Announcements

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

## 67. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 9)

There were two Questions on Notice submitted for consideration at the meeting.

Redditch Innovation Centre

Mr James Fardoe asked the Leader the following Question on Notice:

"As a young person, I have a great interest in the project surrounding the Innovation Centre, would you be able to update us on the timeline regarding the demolition of the current police station and the budgeting of this project?"

The Leader responded by explaining that it was anticipated, subject to planning permission, that the construction for the Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre would start in winter 2024 with practical completion being achieved in winter 2026. The construction period was anticipated to last 12 – 15 months.

On the current programme, the Police Service was due to vacate Grove Street in Autumn 2023 and the demolition of the current police station would commence from thereon. It was anticipated that Redditch Borough Council would then take possession of a clean development site in Spring 2024 with construction taking place later in the year. The project budget was £8,000,000.00 and this was funded by central Government via the Town's Deal Initiative.

Mr Fardoe was advised that further information could be found on the Town's Deal Board's website.

Mr Fardoe subsequently asked the following supplementary question:

"If the total spend goes over predicted budget where will the extra money come from?"

The Leader commented that a comprehensive answer to this question would be requested from the Council's Finance team to send to Mr Fardoe after the meeting.

### Matchborough and Winyates District Centres – Regeneration

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

"To ask the Leader of the Council if he would update the Council on what his plan B is for the regeneration of Winyates and Matchborough District Centres now that Redditch has lost out on his government's funding."

The Leader explained that for Winyates and Matchborough Centres, final proposals for the centres were awaited from consultants. When finalised, the plans would be costed up, by the consultancy team, and the viability gap would then be understood. When received, the proposals would be submitted formally to Members to invite endorsement for the purposes of public consultation. The public consultation, it was suggested, should include information on the viability gap to manage expectations. With proposals, viability information and public comments, the Council would consider all available funding opportunities to progress with the plans.

Councillor Joe Baker subsequently asked the following supplementary question:

"Due to the late submission of the bid and the incompleteness of the report to the Overview and Scrutiny and Executive Committees, will the Leader apologise for Officers losing the £20 million?"

The Leader responded by commenting that the Council had not lost £20 million as this had not been the authority's budget but instead had been applied for in a Government funding scheme. He suggested that he would not apologise and that he did not feel that officers needed to apologise for this. Whilst the report that had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had missed some information, the reasons for this had been explained at the time. The Council had submitted all relevant paperwork to the Government in accordance with the established process and further attempts would be made to bid for more Levelling Up funding in the forthcoming third round of the scheme.

## **68. MOTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 11)**

There were no Motions on Notice for consideration on this occasion.

## **69. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Members considered minutes from meetings of the Executive Committee held on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2022, 13<sup>th</sup> December 2022 and 10<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

Council was reminded that at the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2022 the Committee had made no recommendations. These minutes had therefore been shared for Members' consideration in case there were any questions of clarification on the content and to enable Council to adopt the minutes.

During consideration of the minutes of these meetings, the following reports, that had been debated at those meetings, were discussed in detail:

### Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2025/26 – Update

Concerns were raised that the savings detailed in the report could result in staff redundancies as well as a change to the electoral cycle at the Council from a system of elections by thirds. In addition, some Members raised concerns about the proposed fees for services delivered by Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS).

### Council Tax Base 2023/24

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling highlighted that the Council was required to set the Council Tax Base on an annual basis. The proposals detailed in the report assumed that the

Council would achieve a 98 per cent collection rate, in respect of Council Tax payments during the 2023/24 financial year. The Council Tax Base had been calculated at £26,304.94. This was lower than for many other Councils in Worcestershire as the calculations were based on the numbers of Council Tax Band D equivalent properties in the local authority area and the majority of houses in the Borough were classified as Bands A – C. The lower Council Tax Base placed the Council at a disadvantage and it was suggested that the Council should encourage the Government to take action to change the system.

### Council Tax Support Scheme 2023/24

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling explained that a draft report on the subject of proposed changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme had been considered by the Executive Committee in October 2022. The proposed changes had subsequently been the subject of public consultation. A total of 94 responses had been received during this consultation, of which 87 per cent had expressed support for the proposed changes.

As part of the process, the Council had consulted with all of the precepting authorities. Worcestershire County Council had responded to Redditch Borough Council and had raised some concerns. However, the issues raised would be offset by the benefits arising for eligible residents in the Borough. Members were asked to note that in Worcestershire, only the District Councils in the north of the county had proposed changes to their Council Tax Support Schemes, all of which were designed to benefit vulnerable local residents.

### Housing Revenue Account Rent Setting Report 2023/24

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement presented the Housing Revenue Account Rent Setting Report 2023/24. Members were advised that the report proposed increasing rents for Council house tenants. The Government had announced that Councils could increase rents for Council properties by 3 per cent, 5 per cent or 7 per cent and the report proposed that in Redditch, Council rents should increase by 7 per cent. This increase would help the Council to cover the increasing costs associated with repairs and maintenance of Council properties and help the authority to ensure compliance with legal standards.

During consideration of this item, Councillor Joe Baker proposed the following recommendation:

“We recommend that the Council defers this until we have clearer and more precise information.”

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Baker and seconded by Councillor Juma Begum.

In proposing the recommendation, Councillor Baker commented that in his view the report contained limited information clarifying why the Council had opted to increase rents by 7 per cent rather than 3 per cent or 5 per cent, as permitted by the Government. Councillor Baker raised concerns that this increase was being proposed in a context in which Members were receiving a number of complaints from Council tenants about the condition of Council houses and the speed with which repairs occurred. He suggested that residents might question whether this increase represented value for money.

Members subsequently debated the recommendation in detail and in so doing commented on the following:

- The potential for the Council to increase rents by 3 per cent or 5 per cent and that this information would be useful for comparison with the figures arising from an increase of 7 per cent.
- The need for tenants to have clarity regarding the amount of rent they would be paying for Council properties in the 2023/24 financial year.
- The increases that had been proposed to rents for properties in the private rented sector, which was up to 20 per cent in some places.
- The costs associated with repairs and maintenance of Council houses, which were impacted by the costs of inflation and were also set to increase as a result of new legal duties arising in respect of damp and mould in properties.
- The need for Members to make informed decisions about rent increases based on detailed information about the financial implications for the Council.
- The timescales in which the increases would apply. Concerns were raised that the report appeared to imply that there would be a 7 per cent increase in both 2023/24 and 2024/25.
- The discussions in respect of the report that had taken place at a recent meeting of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group when the item had been pre-scrutinised and the reasons why similar concerns had not been raised on this subject then.
- The level of inflation which was 9 per cent on the date of the Council meeting and the fact that this was higher than the proposed increase to the rent for Council houses.
- The extent to which it was appropriate to increase rents for vulnerable Council house tenants during a cost of living crisis.
- The numbers of new, qualified staff who had been recruited into the Housing Department in recent years.

During consideration of the recommendation, the Interim Section 151 Officer was invited to comment in response to points that had been raised by Members during the debate. Members were informed that detail had been provided at a meeting of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee held in October 2022 in respect of the financial implications arising from increasing rents by 3 per cent or 5 per cent and this had set out how those figures compared to the proposed 7 per cent rise. ~It was acknowledged that the public consultation undertaken in respect of the proposed rent increases had related to a two-year period but the proposed increase to rents for Council houses of 7 per cent would apply for one year only in 2023/24.

On being put to the vote the recommendation was lost.

Members subsequently returned to discussing the substantive Motion.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 17.5 a recorded vote was taken on the substantive Motion in respect of the Housing Revenue Account Rent Setting Report 2023/24 and the voting was as follows:

Members voting FOR the resolution:

Councillors Salman Akbar, Karen Ashley, Joanne Beecham, Juliet Brunner, Michael Chalk, Brandon Clayton, Luke Court, Matthew Dormer, Peter Fleming, Lucy Harrison, Anthony Lovell, Emma Marshall, Timothy Pearman, David Thain and Craig Warhurst (15).

Members voting AGAINST the resolution:

Councillors Joe Baker, Juma Begum, Andrew Fry, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Joanna Kane and Sid Khan (7).

Members voting to ABSTAIN:

No councillors (0).

The vote was therefore carried.

Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board – Budget Recommendations 2023/24

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling explained that the costs of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) shared service were increasing due to a number of factors. In particular, the staff pay award and associated pension costs had increased



pressures on the budget. Each partner authority contributed to the financial costs involved in operating the shared service and the contribution required from Redditch Borough Council in 2023/24 would be 17.9 per cent.

**RESOLVED that**

**the minutes of the meetings of the Executive Committee held on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2022, 13<sup>th</sup> December 2022 and 10<sup>th</sup> January 2023 be received and all recommendations adopted.**

## **70. OUTSIDE BODY APPOINTMENT**

The Deputy Mayor explained that, following the death of the late Councillor, Gareth Prosser, a vacancy had arisen for the Council's lead Member appointed to PATROL – the Traffic Penalty Tribunal (Civil Parking Enforcement).

A nomination was received for Councillor Lucy Harrison to be appointed the Council's lead representative on PATROL – the Traffic Penalty Tribunal.

**RESOLVED that**

**Councillor Lucy Harrison be appointed the Council's lead representative on PATROL – the Traffic Penalty Tribunal for the remainder of the 2022/23 municipal year.**

## **71. URGENT BUSINESS - RECORD OF DECISIONS**

Members were advised that no urgent decisions had been taken since the previous meeting of Council.

## **72. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)**

Officers confirmed that there was no urgent business for discussion on this occasion.