



Council

Monday, 27th February,
2023

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Ann Isherwood (Mayor), Councillor Tom Baker-Price (Deputy Mayor), and councillors Salman Akbar, Imran Altaf, Karen Ashley, Joe Baker, Juliet Barker Smith, Juma Begum, Michael Chalk, Luke Court, Matthew Dormer, Peter Fleming, Alex Fogg, Lucy Harrison, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Joanna Kane, Sid Khan, Anthony Lovell, Emma Marshall, Nyyear Nazir and David Thain

Officers:

Peter Carpenter, Kevin Dicks, Claire Felton, Sue Hanley and Michelle Howell

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

73. WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all those present to the meeting.

74. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Joanne Beecham, Juliet Brunner, Brandon Clayton, Andrew Fry, Timothy Pearman and Craig Warhurst.

75. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

76. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 30th January 2023 were considered.

Members commented that, as detailed in the minutes, there had been different views expressed by Councillors at the previous meeting in respect of the proposed increase of rents for Council House tenants by 7%.

Chair

Questions were raised about whether the supplementary question that had been asked by a member of the public at the previous meeting had been answered. Officers confirmed that an answer had been provided to the gentleman concerned.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 30th January 2023 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Mayor.

77. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following announcements were provided:

a) The Mayor's Announcements

A list of the civic engagements that had been attended by the Mayor since the previous meeting of Council was tabled at the meeting (Appendix 1).

The Mayor commented that highlights during this period had included attendance at the local Star Wars exhibition, which had been attended by visitors from a range of destinations, as far afield as Sweden.

The funeral for former Councillor, Gareth Prosser, had taken place in February 2023 and the Mayor had attended this on behalf of the Council. The funeral had been very moving and thought provoking.

The Mayor had also undertaken a tour of William Smith and Son Limited's factory in Redditch during this period. The business was still producing needles and had provided a helpful reminder of the Borough's rich history.

b) The Leader's Announcements

The Leader explained that, since the previous meeting of Council, he had attended meetings of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Board, the District Councils' Network (DCN) Conference, a Business Leaders' meeting and a meeting of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) Board.

c) The Chief Executive's Announcements

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

78. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Independent Remuneration Panel Recommendations 2023/24

The Leader presented recommendations that had been made at the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 7th February 2023 in respect of Members' Allowances for 2023/24. Council was informed that, whilst the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) had proposed an increase to the basic allowance for Members, the Executive Committee had concluded that it would not be appropriate at this time to increase the basic allowance. The Executive Committee had also chosen not to endorse the IRP's proposals in respect of the Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) paid to Members. Members were asked to note that whilst the basic allowance would not increase at this time, there would be a need to increase the basic allowance in future to ensure that new and young candidates could continue to stand in local elections moving forward.

During consideration of this item, Councillor Joe Baker presented an amendment on behalf of the Labour Group (Appendix 2).

The amendment was proposed by Councillor Baker and seconded by Councillor Sharon Harvey.

In proposing the amendment, Councillor Baker commented that he agreed with the Executive Committee's proposal not to increase the basic allowance for Members and to retain existing arrangements for travel, subsistence and carer's allowance claims. However, the amendments proposed changes to the level at which various SRAs for different positions at the Council should be set. This included proposing an increase to the SRA for the position of leader of the opposition, to reflect the increasing importance of the role, as well as a reduction in the SRAs for the positions of Deputy Leader, Portfolio Holders and the Chairs of a number of Committees. In addition, the amendment proposed that there should be no SRAs payable to Members of the Executive Committee without portfolio and that no Member should be able to claim multiple SRAs. The amendment, should it be agreed, would result in savings of £21,872 for the Council.

In seconding the amendment, Councillor Harvey highlighted that not paying multiple SRAs and not paying SRAs for the position of Executive Committee member without portfolio, corresponded with proposals from the IRP. She commented that she supported proposals not to increase the basic allowance at this time, but she suggested that, under the current Scheme of Allowances, payments

of SRAs were over inflated and the amendment was designed to address this.

Members discussed the amendment in detail and in doing so commented on the following:

- The fact that Members had been able to claim multiple SRAs in Redditch for many years.
- The arrangement in place at other Councils in Worcestershire, whereby Members were not permitted to claim multiple SRAs.
- The level of increase proposed to the SRA for the leader of the opposition and the appropriate remuneration for this post.
- The role of the IRP in providing advice to the Council about Members' allowances and the need for the authority to be mindful of the IRP's proposals.
- The amount of time that Portfolio Holders needed to dedicate to undertaking their roles effectively and the need for this to be suitably reimbursed.
- The need for many Councillors to meet their duties as Councillors whilst also addressing other responsibilities, including work commitments.
- The many voluntary hours that elected Members dedicated to their roles as Councillors.
- The various commitments that Councillors could have in their elected Member roles, including case work, Committee attendance and representing the authority on outside bodies.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

Following further discussion, on being put to the vote, the recommendations from the Executive Committee in respect of Members' allowances 2023/24 were carried.

Pay Policy Statement 2023/24

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Pay Policy Statement 2023/24. Members were advised that the Pay Policy Statement, needed to be approved by Council on a yearly basis. The report detailed the remuneration levels for Officers and the relationship between them. All items were budgeted for in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). The Council set employees' pay and remuneration in accordance with relevant legislation. Members were asked to note that the Council had:

- Officer Grades 1-11
- 2 Manager Grades
- 3 Head of Service Grades
- Executive Director
- Deputy Chief Executive

- Chief Executive

Members were advised that the Council was part of the National Pay Bargaining Framework. Manager posts were evaluated by an external assessor. Other pay related allowances were subject to either national or local negotiated rates. Appointments were normally made at the minimum of the relevant grade. There was a system of annual progression to the next point on the pay scale. The Council did not apply bonuses or performance related pay to Chief Officers. Movement on scales was via satisfactory performance which was assessed annually. Posts over £50,000 were also required to be published in the Statement of Accounts. The Appointments Committee was responsible for recommending to Council matters relating to the appointment of the Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer, Section 151 Officer, and other Chief Officers. Should disciplinary action be required in respect of the Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and S151 Officer, this would be led by the Statutory Officers Disciplinary Panel.

On being put to the vote the recommendation was carried.

Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2025/26 (Including the Treasury Management Strategy and Capital Programme)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the MTFP 2023/24 to 2025/26 (Including the Treasury Management Strategy and Capital Programme). The report detailed the final 2023-24 to 2025-26 budgets for the Council in the MTFP. During the year, the Council had followed a two tranche process and Members were advised that the Council had entered into the process with an ongoing £1 million gap to be closed.

For the Tranche 1 proposals, progress had been achieved in respect of the £1.5m of savings proposals that had been made. However, pressures of £2.9m, mainly due to significant inflationary increases, had resulted in an increased gap of £1.7 million.

In reviewing the authority's basic assumptions (following the Provisional Local Government Settlement on the 19th December 2022) the following needed to be taken into account:

- The Council would increase Council Tax by 2.99%.
- Pay inflation increases had been adjusted to the actual award levels which had been applied to employees' pay budgets in December 2022. This amounted to £728,000, which was £200,000 less than assumed in Tranche 1 mainly due to staff vacancies. Future pay awards were assumed at 2%.

- General Inflation was assumed to increase at 10% with utilities inflation increasing by 200%. This assumption had not changed since Tranche 1.
- The Provisional Local Government Settlement was positive for the Council, which had received:
 - £19,000 New Homes Bonus
 - £86,000 Services Grant
 - £493,000 Funding Guarantee Grant
 - A £130,000 reduction in the Council Tax base
- Overall, this was worth £468,000 for the Council and was in line with previous years' overall amounts. As this was only a one-year settlement, an assumption of an ongoing amount of £450,000 had been made for the final two years of the MTFP.

There had been a number of positive developments since the Tranche 1 savings had been agreed. This included:

- The final Triennial Pension Fund amounts had added a further £221,000 of ongoing savings for the following three years.
- Officers had reviewed and reallocated Earmarked Reserves, reallocating £1.7 million to cover half of the 200% utilities increase assumption and reducing budgetary amounts by £570,000 a year.
- Business Rates had many factors impacting on them, including relief from the Covid-19 period. Overall, £466,000 would support the base budget, and £200,00 would support the General Fund. As this was assessed by the Government on a yearly basis, only a £250,000 benefit had been assumed in future years.

This had the combined effect to move the £1.7 million deficit position that the Council had been in when Tranche 1 savings had been considered, to a £255,000 surplus. However, there were £0.6m of pressures to add to this. Consequently, the bottom-line figure for each year in the MTFP would be:

- A £311,000 deficit in 2023/24
- A £67,000 deficit in 2024/25
- A £63,000 surplus in 2025/26

Key pressures remained which included:

- Refurbishment of the Council's vehicle fleet, which extended the life of existing vehicles for five years and let the Council buy replacements in 2028 when supply would be more stable.
- A fund for apprentices across the Council in order for the authority to take advantage of apprenticeship levies and "grow" the Council's own staff at a cost of £50,000.

- The Council needed to fund a data analyst post at a cost of £25,000 whilst the authority moved forward with all the work on automation and robotics, as there was only one staff member who could currently lead on this. The recruitment of this data analyst would indirectly lead to further savings, as new processes were embedded in future years' budgets.
- The extension of the use of Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) to increase the speed at which planning enforcement was undertaken, at a cost of £25,000.
- The increased costs of WRS due to the pay award and other inflationary increases, at a cost of £47,000.
- Bringing employee budgets up to the full 2% level for pay awards in 2023/24 and 2024/25, at a cost of £100,000.
- The Council Tax Collection Fund was projected to under-recover by £1.589 million. The Council portion of this was 13% which was £190,000 for 2023/24.

Officers had reviewed Earmarked Reserves, which had seen little movement over recent years. As a consequence:

- £1.710 million had been reallocated to a Utilities Reserve and £1.584 million had been transferred to the General Fund.
- The majority of funding to support these changes came from the Covid-19 Reserve (£0.941 million), and the Business Rates Retention Reserve (£1.500 million).
- It was assumed that the Utilities Reserve would reduce to 0 over the MTFP period.

The significant issue for the General Fund was the impact of the 2022/23 overspend position which, as reported in the Quarter 2 Finance and Performance Monitoring Report, was £1.424 million. The impact of all these factors was that at the end of the MTFP period, the 31st March 2026, General Fund reserve levels were projected to be £2.114 million. This was above the 5% level suggested by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) of £1.2 million, although given the overspend in 2022/23, a level closer to 10% of £2.25 million was considered to be a more prudent benchmark.

The Financial Strategy was to move the Council to financial sustainability in its Revenue Accounts by the 2024/25 financial year. To get to this position, there would be the need for investment and possibly the requirement to fund redundancies (both from reserves). These requirements would arise following the Council having to implement changes to the way it operated in order to continue to be a viable entity going forward and this would take 18 months to implement fully.

The Capital Programme for the following three years was set out in the report. Many of the schemes in the Capital Programme were already in partial delivery in the 2022/23 financial year. By approving this list, the Council was also agreeing for sums not spent in previous years to be carried forward into 2023/24. The programme was significant however, it was supported by the following substantial external funding:

- In 2023/4, of the £12.6 million programme, £10.6 million was externally funded.
- In 2024/5, of the £16.2 million programme, £10.9 million was externally funded.
- In 2025/6, of the £4.8 million programme, £3 million was externally funded.

The external funding included £15.2 million of the Town's Fund Grant and £2.5 million of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Grant, both of which were time limited.

Linked to the Capital Programme were the Council's Capital Strategy, Treasury Management Strategy, Minimum Revenue Strategy and Investment Strategy. These strategies detailed how the Council could invest surplus funds and borrow to fund its capital investments. Members were asked to note that if Councils were to "invest for gain", they could not use the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) to fund expenditure, which was significantly lower than private finance. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling confirmed that the Council did not "invest for gain".

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was a ring-fenced account which could not be subsidised by the General Fund. Rents for 2023/24 had been increased by 7% in line with national limits.

Members were advised that the opinion of the Interim Chief Finance Officer was that the 2023/24 budget estimates contained considerable risk due to the continued level of uncertainty in the Council's operating environment and a single year financial settlement, making it problematic to develop meaningful assumptions. Key risks to be aware of included:

- The Council had not yet closed the authority's 2021/22 accounts, with the Period 11 Monitoring Report estimated outturn of £136,000 underspend still to be validated.
- The 2022/23 financial monitoring was showing an overspend position of £1.424 million.
- The core risks of implementation of any MTFP.
- Loss of key personnel, with the average age of staff being 49. Mitigation plans therefore needed to be drawn up.

- The time limited nature of the large Town's Fund and UKSPF grant funding. If programmes were not delivered within the Government's specified timescales, then the Council would be liable for ongoing delivery expenditure.
- Business Rates Income – Especially with the 1st April 2023 revaluations that were being undertaken, actual income received would vary depending on actual Business Rates growth, and levels of appeals.
- The ongoing impact of inflation, especially around utilities.
- Possible changes of corporate direction/priorities following the elections in May 2023.

During consideration of this item, Councillor Joe Baker proposed an alternative budget on behalf of the Labour Group.

The alternative budget proposed the following:

“We agree that the right approach for the use of the Town Hall is as a Community Hub, but are opposed to the Library moving in as a tenant as they should remain at their present site. We know, with the present 2023/24 to 25/16 Medium Term Financial Plan, that this will result in a deficit of circa £260k. However, we agree with the Community Hub concept and our approach will be to attract other Public and Voluntary Sector Tenants to ensure there is no shortfall in 2025/26.

We want to invigorate the area running down from the Church past the library with a static market, which for Four days including a Saturday would be available for normal traders, with a specialist Market as and when required. We need to ensure that we attract footfall to this area to attract business both to the Market and existing shops. As such we propose investing in high quality Stalls (such as Wells) which would cost £50k. This equates to a capital cost of £5k a year (over 20 years) and net running costs of £33k a year - £38k in total.

We propose funding The Market initiative from the following two sources

- 1) The revised member Allowance Scheme. The Original costs of the Scheme are £236,600 and our proposals reduce the cost to £214,728 – a £21,872 reduction
- 2) The remaining £16,128 would be a reduction in Rubicon Management fee. Any additional costs due to Utilities over and above this difference would be funded from the Utilities Reserve.

In year three there is a proposal, approved at Council in January, to move to all out elections which we oppose. The savings in the

2025/26 financial year is £170,000. We feel there needs to be a debate at full Council before a measure like this is implemented as it has a significant impact on all Political parties.”

The alternative budget was proposed by Councillor Baker and seconded by Councillor Juma Begum.

In proposing the alternative budget, Councillor Baker commented that local government finances were in a challenging position and many Councils had had to cut services and / or increase fees to pay for services, which impacted on vulnerable residents in particular. The alternative budget was also being proposed in a context in which the Council had recently been issued with a Section 24 Notice and after the Council had been unsuccessful in securing funding in the second round of the national Levelling Up programme. Members were advised that there was limited room for manoeuvre with the Council’s finances, but the alternative budget did make proposals that were designed to support economic growth and investment in the Borough. This included proposals in respect of reintroducing a static market in Redditch town centre. Redditch was a market town and the alternative budget made proposals suitable for a modern market.

The alternative budget also highlighted opposition to moving the main library in the town into the community hub, although support remained for a community hub moving forward and it was suggested that alternative tenants could hire space in the Town Hall to make up for any lost income from the library.

In order to achieve a balanced position in the alternative budget, Councillor Baker explained that the proposal was to use £21,872 savings from changes to Members’ allowances, as discussed earlier in the meeting. In addition, the alternative budget proposed a reduction in financial support for Rubicon Leisure Limited. An additional pressure would, however, be created as a result of the alternative budget removing the inclusion of savings from introducing all out elections from 2025/26 onwards.

In seconding the alternative budget, Councillor Begum commented that the market was important to the Borough. There was a need to help grow businesses in the town and the alternative budget was designed to achieve this whilst also removing the suggestion that the library should be relocated to the Town Hall.

Members subsequently discussed the alternative budget in detail and in so doing commented on the following:

- The role of markets in the modern era and the ways in which markets had changed over the years.

- The impact that the Covid-19 pandemic had had on people's shopping habits both locally and nationally.
- The extent to which current market holders, operating from the Kingfisher Shopping Centre, were interested in returning to having an outdoor market in the town centre.
- The potential for new static market stalls to be used for the market.
- The option to hold themed markets in the town and the potential for this to attract new customers.
- The potential for new market stall holders to be introduced in a static market in the town and the level of interest amongst local entrepreneurs in taking up opportunities to introduce a market stall.
- The option for the Council to apply for further Levelling Up funding in the third round of the programme.
- The Town's Funding that had been received for the redevelopment of Redditch town centre and how this compared to other parts of the country.
- The risks to the Council should the authority not deliver the programmes, for which funding had been received through the Town's Fund, according to deadlines set by the Government.
- The impact that groups such as Digbeth Outdoor Dining had had on the vibrancy of the former covered market area in Redditch.
- The extent to which people in the local community were opposed to the relocation of the Library from its existing position to a community hub in the Town Hall.
- The plans for the community hub and the history in respect of decisions that had been taken on this subject.
- The Government's Fair Funding Review for local government and the need for clarity to be provided on the outcomes of this for the consideration of Councils moving forward.
- The impact that inflation was having on costs, which had particular implications for the capital programme and HRA.
- The need for transparency when reporting on the Council's budget position.
- The pressures that remained in the budget for future years, including in respect of the replacement of the Council's vehicle fleet.
- The review of the market that had been undertaken by the Redditch Market Scrutiny Task Group a number of years previously and the outcomes of this investigation.
- The extent to which the alternative budget achieved a balanced budget for 2023/24, in light of the previous decision during the Council meeting not to make any changes to the Members' Scheme of Allowances in respect of SRAs. The Interim Section 151 Officer confirmed that, as a consequence

of this decision, there was a £21,872 gap in the alternative budget for 2023/24.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, the alternative budget was subject to a named vote.

Members voting FOR the alternative budget:

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

Members voting AGAINST the alternative budget:

Councillors Salman Akbar, Imran Altaf, Karen Ashley, Tom Baker-Price, Michael Chalk, Luke Court, Matthew Dormer, Peter Fleming, Alex Fogg, Lucy Harrison, Ann Isherwood, Anthony Lovell, Emma Marshall, Nyehar Nazir and David Thain (15).

Members ABSTAINING in the vote:

No Councillors (0).

The vote on the alternative budget was therefore lost.

Following discussion of the alternative budget, Members discussed the potential for all out elections to be introduced from 2025/26 onwards. There was general consensus that a system of elections by thirds worked well for Redditch. A decision not to progress with plans for all out elections would have financial implications for the Council in the third year of the MTFP. However, Members were advised that the legal requirement was to set a balanced budget in the first year of the plan and this would be achieved should Members agree the rest of the MTFP proposed by the Executive Committee on 7th February 2023.

Members subsequently debated the content of the MTFP recommendations from the Executive Committee in detail and in so doing commented on the reduction in funding that local Councils had received from the Government in recent years. Members suggested that there was a need for Councils to lobby the Government about increasing funding available to local government moving forward in order to minimise the impact on residents.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, and subject to the amendment to the MTFP for 2025/26 in respect of removing reference to the introduction of all out elections, all of the

recommendations in the Medium Term Financial Plan were subject to a named vote.

Members voting FOR the recommendations in the Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2025/26:

Councillors Salman Akbar, Imran Altaf, Karen Ashley, Tom Baker-Price, Michael Chalk, Luke Court, Matthew Dormer, Peter Fleming, Alex Fogg, Lucy Harrison, Ann Isherwood, Anthony Lovell, Emma Marshall, Nyear Nazir and David Thain (15).

Members voting AGAINST the recommendations in the Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2025/26:

No Councillors (0).

Members voting to ABSTAIN in the vote on the recommendations in the Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2025/26:

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

Subject to the amendment in respect of removing reference to savings from all out elections in 2025/26, the vote on the recommendations from the Executive Committee in relation to the Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2025/26 was therefore carried.

30-Year HRA Business Plan, Investment Programme and Asset Management Strategy for Council Housing

Members considered the content of the 30-Year HRA Business Plan, Investment Programme and Asset Management Strategy for Council Housing.

During consideration of this item, Members noted that the report had been pre-scrutinised at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 23rd February 2023. At this meeting, Members had endorsed the recommendations detailed in the report and had also proposed a number of additional recommendations as considerations for the Executive Committee. These recommendations had been discussed at a meeting of the Executive Committee held immediately before the Council meeting on 27th February 2023 but had been rejected.

Whilst discussing the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's debate in respect of this item, Councillor Bill Hartnett proposed the recommendations that had been made at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, as follows:

“Members consider the following:

- a) Providing more parking spaces, or being more specific about when and where parking spaces will be provided for Council houses.
- b) Transferring funding for handling mould and damp on properties from the Repairs and Maintenance (R&M) budget to the Capital Programme.
- c) The Overview and Scrutiny Committee highlights the projected loss of 600 properties and the need to consider what can be done to reduce this figure.
- d) Fitting solar panels to new build properties and / or suitable existing properties in the Council’s housing stock.
- e) Adding a provisional budget, which could be amended at a later date, to pay for works needed to improve the energy efficiency of the Council’s housing stock to at least an EPC C rating.”

The additional recommendations were proposed by Councillor Hartnett and seconded by Councillor Joanna Kane.

In proposing these recommendations, Councillor Hartnett commented that the recommendations had received unanimous support at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. Whilst he recognised that the 30-year HRA report was a strategic document, parking was a significant issue for local residents and therefore required careful consideration. Damp and mould were both issues that were addressed using revenue funding from the Repairs and Maintenance budget, but Members had suggested that this could also be addressed in the capital budget. The 30-year HRA Plan was projecting a net reduction of 600 Council house properties over the period of the plan and there were some concerns amongst Members about the need to prioritise action to address this. There was also a need to improve the energy efficiency of Council houses moving forward and the Council could learn from partner organisations that were already developing energy efficient properties locally. The recommendations would help to address these points moving forward.

In seconding the recommendations, Councillor Kane commented that there had been a very detailed debate at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting when this matter had been discussed. Council was informed that there was a need for more parking spaces for Council house tenants. The HRA Plan covered a period of 30 years and there was a need to start planning for this period, including in respect of matters such as parking, damp on properties and building new properties. In respect of damp, Members had discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting the

cases of damp and mould that were being reported to Members as part of their casework, and that this could have a detrimental impact on people's health. Members were also asked to note that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had only suggested installing solar panels where suitable to existing and new Council houses.

The additional recommendations were subsequently debated and during the course of this debate the following points were considered:

- The length of the Executive Committee meeting that had taken place immediately prior to the Council meeting at which the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been debated.
- The Council's existing programme for reviewing parking spaces. Members were advised that the next phase of this programme was in the process of being reviewed but the Council's potential to act was limited in relation to the land owned by the authority and the space available in which to introduce extra parking spaces.
- The action that was already taken to address issues with damp and mould using funding from the existing Repair and Maintenance budget. Council was advised that a programme of capital works would be drawn up once these works had been completed.
- The fact that the number of houses due to be sold under right to buy was a projected figure. Members commented that there was a need to assess trends in sales figures before making any decisions on this subject.
- The action that was already being taken to build new Council houses in the Borough.
- The need for greater action to be taken, in addition to installing solar panels, in order for properties to receive improved Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ratings. Members commented that insulation in properties needed to be improved.
- The complex legal implications of installing features on properties that would improve energy efficiency, including in respect of owner-occupied properties.
- The difficulties assessing the financial costs involved in taking greater action on enhancing the energy efficiency of properties at this stage and the need for budget bids to be presented at a later date once there was further clarity.
- The role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a critical friend and the need to take recommendations from the Committee seriously.

On being put to the vote, the additional recommendations proposed by Councillor Hartnett were lost.

Following this debate, Members considered the recommendations from the Executive Committee in respect of the 30-year HRA Business Plan. There was general support for these recommendations and Members thanked Officers for their hard work in respect of preparing the report.

On being put to the vote, the recommendations from the Executive Committee in respect of the 30-year HRA Business Plan were carried.

Council Tax Resolutions 2023/24

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Executive Committee's recommendations on the Council Tax Resolutions, which had been made at a meeting of the Executive Committee held immediately prior to the Council meeting.

Members were advised that it was necessary to formally set Council Tax levels throughout the area for the spending requirements of Redditch Borough Council, Worcestershire County Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia, Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority and Feckenham Parish Council.

Details had been received from the various precepting bodies to enable the Council to set the Council Tax for 2023/24. The amounts of the preceptors were:

:

- Worcestershire County Council - £38.557 million
- Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia - £6.957 million
- Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority - £2.485 million
- Redditch Borough Council - £6.885m – a 2.99% increase
- Feckenham Parish Precept - £20,000 – a 32.88% increase

This increased Council Tax for a Band "D" property from £2,030.04 to £2,139.65, representing a 5.40% increase.

At a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 10th January 2023, Members had calculated the Council Tax Base 2023/24 as:

- (a) for the whole Council area as 26,304.94; and
- (b) for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a Parish precept related; this being Feckenham Parish, as 375.79.

This had informed the Executive Committee's recommendations to Council in respect of the Council Tax Resolutions for 2023/24.

Members discussed the proposed increases to Council Tax. In doing so, Members welcomed the fact that the level of increase to Council Tax proposed for Redditch Borough Council was relatively low, at an increase of 2.99%, which was considered to be appropriate during a time of a cost of living crisis.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, the recommendations in respect of the Council Tax Resolutions 2023/24 were subject to a named vote.

Members voting FOR the Council Tax Resolutions:

Councillors Salman Akbar, Imran Altaf, Karen Ashley, Joe Baker, Tom Baker Price, Juliet Barker Smith, Juma Begum, Michael Chalk, Luke Court, Matthew Dormer, Peter Fleming, Alex Fogg, Lucy Harrison, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Ann Isherwood, Joanna Kane, Sid Khan, Anthony Lovell, Emma Marshall, Nyear Nazir and David Thain (22).

Members voting AGAINST the Council Tax Resolutions:

No Councillors (0).

Members who ABSTAINED in the vote on the Council Tax Resolutions:

No Councillors (0).

The vote on the Council Tax Resolutions 2023/24 was therefore carried.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday, 7th February 2023 be approved and all recommendations adopted subject to the following amendment to the Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2025/26:**

The removal of the move to all out elections from 2025/26 from the budget, resulting in the loss of savings of £170,000 per year from 2025/26 onwards;

- 2) the Housing Revenue Account 30-year Business Plan 2023-2053 be approved;**
- 3) the Housing Asset Management Strategy be approved;**

- 4) the Housing Capital Programme 2023-2027 be approved;
that the following be approved:
- 5) the calculation for the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2023/24 (excluding Parish precepts) as £6,885,318.04;
- 6) that the following amounts be calculated for the year 2023/24 in accordance with sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
 - (a) £49,710,521 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (2) of the Act (taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils) (*i.e.*, *Gross expenditure*);
 - (b) £42,805,203 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) of the Act. (*i.e.*, *Gross income*);
 - (c) £6,905,318 being the amount by which the aggregate of 1.2.2(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 1.2.2(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A (4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act);
 - (d) £262.51 being the amount at 1.2.2 (c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (1.1(a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish precepts);
 - (e) £20,000 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Feckenham Parish precept) referred to in Section 34 (1) of the Act;
 - (f) £261.75 being the amount at 1.2.2 (d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 1.2.2 (e) above by Item T (1.1 (a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34 (2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish precept relates;
 - (g) £314.97 being the amount given by adding to the amount at 1.2.2(f), the amount of the special item

relating to the Parish of Feckenham 1.2.2(e), divided by the amount in 1.1(b) above;

- (h) the amounts below given by multiplying the amounts at 1.2.2(f) and 1.2.2(g) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band, divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in Band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwelling listed in different valuation bands;

Valuation Band	Proportion of Band D tax paid	Parish of Feckenham £	All other parts of the Council's area £
A	6/9	209.98	174.50
B	7/9	244.97	203.58
C	8/9	279.98	232.67
D	1	314.97	261.75
E	11/9	384.97	319.92
F	13/9	454.95	378.08
G	15/9	524.95	436.25
H	18/9	629.94	523.50

- 7) it be noted that for the year 2023/24, Worcestershire County Council, Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia and Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority have issued precepts to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 for each category of dwelling in the Council's area as indicated below:

	Valuation Bands							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Worcestershire County Council	977.19	1,140.05	1,302.92	1,465.78	1,791.51	2,117.24	2,442.97	2,931.56
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia	176.33	205.72	235.11	264.50	323.28	382.06	440.83	529.00
Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority	62.93	73.42	83.91	94.40	115.38	136.36	157.33	188.80

- 8) that having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at 1.2.2(h) and 1.2.3 above, that Redditch Borough Council in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 hereby sets the amounts shown below as the amounts of Council Tax for 2023/24. for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings:

Valuation Band	Proportion of Band D tax paid	Parish of Feckenham £	All other parts of the Council's area £
A	6/9	1,426.43	1,390.95
B	7/9	1,664.16	1,622.77
C	8/9	1,901.92	1,854.61
D	1	2,139.65	2,086.43
E	11/9	2,615.14	2,550.09
F	13/9	3,090.61	3,013.74
G	15/9	3,566.08	3,477.38
H	18/9	4,279.30	4,172.86

- 9) that the Interim Director of Finance be authorised to make payments under Section 90(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 from the Collection Fund by ten equal instalments between April 2023 to March 2024 as detailed below:

	Precept	Deficit on Collection Fund	Total to pay
	£	£	£
Worcestershire County Council	38,557,255.00	(999,626.00)	37,557,629.00
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia	6,957,656.63	(178,673.00)	6,778,983.63
Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority	2,483,282.63	(63,980.00)	2,419,302.63

- 10) that the Interim Director of Finance be authorised to make transfers under Section 97 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 from the Collection Fund to the General Fund the sum of £6,723,433 being the Council's own demand on the Collection Fund (£6,885,318) and Parish Precept (£20,000) and the distribution of the deficit on the Collection Fund (-£181,885);
- 11) that the Interim Director of Finance be authorised to make payments from the General Fund to Feckenham Parish Council the sums listed above (£20,000) by instalment after 1 April 2023 in respect of the precept levied on the Council;
- 12) that the above resolutions to be signed by the Chief Executive for use in legal proceedings in the Magistrates Court for the recovery of unpaid Council Taxes; and
- 13) notices of the making of the said Council Taxes signed by the Chief Executive are given by advertisement in the local press under Section 38(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

79. CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW WORKING PARTY - RECOMMENDATIONS

Council considered recommended changes to the constitution that had been made at a meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Party held on 23rd January 2023. The recommendations focused on proposed changes to the Council's Policy Framework, detailed in the Articles of the constitution, and to the Scheme of Delegations.

The content of the report was considered in some detail and during the debate specific reference was made to the changes that had been proposed to the Council's Policy Framework. Members

commented that items that no longer existed should be removed from the Policy Framework. In addition, Members suggested that items that were likely to be considered by a more appropriate body should also be removed from the Policy Framework.

During the Constitutional Review Working Party meeting, Members had agreed that further information should be provided at the group's following meeting in respect of the Emergency Plan, Enforcement Policies and the Sustainable Community Strategy. Members suggested that the Single Equalities Scheme should also be considered at this meeting, as concerns were raised about whether it was necessary for this to be removed from the Policy Framework at this time. The decision was taken, therefore, not to remove the Single Equalities Scheme from the Policy Framework at this time and to instead debate the issue at the following meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Party.

Concerns were raised about the extent to which it was appropriate to reduce the size of the Policy Framework and to add further delegations to officers in the Officer Scheme of Delegations. Members commented that it was important to ensure that Councillors continued to have a role in decision making as an integral part of the local democratic process. However, it was also commented that the content of the current Policy Framework was out of date. In addition, the extra delegations to officers that had been proposed would help the Council to comply with best practice and to improve the efficiency of the Council's approach to processing Government grants. Members also noted that the delegation in respect of Government grant funding only related to grants that had been ring fenced for specific purposes and which needed to be distributed quickly in order to avoid needing to return any of the funds to the Government.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Section 151 Officer be delegated authority to accept, administer and distribute ring fenced Government Grant Funding, or Funding from bodies acting on behalf of Government, and to make the necessary and corresponding adjustments to the Medium Term Financial Plan following consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder and subject to meeting the conditions of grant funding;**
- 2) the Chief Executive be delegated authority, as Proper Officer, to declare the office of Councillor vacant immediately after a person has ceased to be a Councillor where s/he has not attended a Council or Committee meeting for six months or more; and**

- 3) **subject to retaining the existing reference to the Single Equalities Scheme, the Policy Framework be updated to remove reference to policies that no longer exist or which are considered in an alternative forum and to add reference to the Contract Procedure Rules.**

80. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Bill Hartnett, presented the Committee's Annual Report 2022/23.

Council was advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had had a busy year and had held a significant number of extra meetings largely to enable Members to pre-scrutinise some important reports. The Committee had also received some overview items for debate at meetings but, due to limited officer capacity, had not been able to launch any Task Group investigations during the year.

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were thanked for their hard work, particularly the Vice Chair, Councillor Joanna Kane, who had chaired the Budget and Performance Scrutiny Working Groups as well as Councillor Michael Chalk, who had provided regular updates on the work of the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) and the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Local residents who had submitted evidence during the course of the year for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's consideration were also thanked for their time and contributions.

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23 be noted.

81. URGENT BUSINESS - RECORD OF DECISIONS

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

82. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

There was no urgent business for consideration on this occasion.