



Executive Committee

Tuesday, 9th July, 2024

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Joe Baker (Chair), Councillor Sharon Harvey (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Juliet Barker Smith, Bill Hartnett, Jen Snape, Jane Spilsbury, Monica Stringfellow and Ian Woodall

Also Present:

Councillors Claire Davies, Joanna Kane and David Munro

Officers:

Matthew Bough, Peter Carpenter, Nicola Cummings, Sue Hanley and Darren Whitney

Democratic Services Officers:

Jess Bayley-Hill

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Sid Khan.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader welcomed all those present to the first meeting of the Executive Committee to be held in the 2024/25 municipal year.

Members were advised that at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Monday 8th July 2024, Members had pre-scrutinised the Productivity Plan report, which was due to be considered at the Executive Committee meeting. No recommendations had been made on this subject by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Executive Committee thanked members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their time spent reviewing this report.

Chair

The Executive Committee was informed that at that meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee a recommendation had been made on a separate matter, concerning rules for scrutinising Executive decisions. This recommendation was due to be considered during the Executive Committee meeting.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 18th March 2024 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. RECOMMISSIONING OF THE PROMOTING INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICE (HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY)

The Strategic Housing and Business Support Manager presented a report on the subject of the Recommissioning of the Promoting Independent Living Service (Home Improvement Agency) for Members' consideration.

The Committee was informed that Redditch Borough Council worked with other local authorities in Worcestershire in terms of the delivery of this service at a countywide level. The existing contract for this service had been reviewed and was going through the procurement process. The service provided a range of support to eligible customers, with management of disabled facilities grants forming a key feature of the service. Members were asked to note that the service was only provided to residents who were not Council tenants.

Following the presentation of the report, Members commented on the value of the Home Improvement Agency service to the community. Reference was made to the tendering process and it was noted that there was no guarantee that the successful bidder would be based in Redditch, although services would be delivered in the Borough.

Consideration was given to the quality assurance arrangements for this service and Members questioned how the contract was managed and the service was monitored. Officers explained that there was a contract management group for the service. In addition, the successful contractor would be required to comply with a range of key performance indicators (KPIs). Furthermore, the Government had issued guidance two years' previously which detailed the process for use of disabled facilities grant funding. Many aspects of this guidance would be incorporated into the contract and the contractor would be obliged to comply with these

guidelines from year 2 onwards, as well as to demonstrate that they were working towards compliance in the first year of the contract.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **approval be given to recommission the Promoting Independent Living Service;**
 - 2) **authority be delegated to the Head of Community and Housing Services, in consultation with the Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services and following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing to agree the final process, timetable and evaluation model for the appointment of a new contractor to deliver the Home Improvement Agency service; and**
 - 3) **to award the contract to the successful provider(s).**
6. **INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES 2024/25**

The Electoral Services Manager presented the Independent Remuneration Panel's (IRP's) report in respect of their proposals for Members' allowances in the 2024/25 financial year. This report had been prepared in December 2023, but the decision had been taken by Members to postpone making a decision on this subject until after the local elections held in May 2024.

In considering the report, Members were asked to note that the IRP had made recommendations about Members' allowances based on information that they had gathered. There was no requirement for the Council to approve all of the IRP's recommendations, however, Members needed to give due regard to the proposals detailed in the report.

Following the presentation of the report, the Leader circulated a table detailing proposals for Members' allowances for the 2024/25 financial year (Appendix 1). This included the following:

- An increase of 3 per cent on the basic allowance of £4,732 to £4,874 for all Members. The proposed increase was justified on the basis that this linked to inflation. A greater increase of 16.6 per cent, to reach the level suggested by the IRP, was considered to be too steep to be justifiable in the current financial climate.
- Retaining multipliers of the previous basic allowance of £4,732 for the majority of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) payable to Members in specific roles at the authority. This was suggested in order to limit the potential increases in

- payments of allowances that would otherwise arise for all SRAs as a result of the increase to the basic allowance.
- Exceptions to the position outlined in respect of the SRAs included proposed increases to the SRAs for the position of Chair of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee and the leader of the opposition, where increases to these SRA were proposed to £3,500 and £4,500 per annum respectively. These increases were proposed in recognition of the significant workload and responsibilities attached to these roles.
 - Whilst the position was not referred to in the table, Members were asked to note that the SRA for the position of Chair of a Scrutiny Task Group would be retained at a level of £1,183 per annum.
 - Whilst the increase to the basic allowance would result in a slight increase in overall costs associated with Members' allowances, the reduction in the number of Councillors from 29 to 27 in May 2024 would help to limit the impact of these increases. Furthermore, the Section 151 Officer had confirmed that these increases could be accommodated within existing budgets.
 - The proposed changes to the Members' allowances for the 2024/25 financial year would be backdated to 7th May 2024, which was the first date on which Members elected in May 2024 became Councillors.

The Committee discussed the proposed amendments to Members' Allowances and in doing so noted that they had considered the information provided in the IRP's report. There was general consensus that recommendations 3 to 6 in the IRP's report could be supported, as these would not result in any changes to the provision of Members' allowances or an increase in costs. Whilst the changes discussed at the meeting meant that the Committee would not be supporting the IRP's first and second recommendations, the increase to the basic allowance would help to reduce the gap between allowances paid to Redditch Borough Councillors and Members representing other local authorities in Worcestershire.

RECOMMENDED

- 1) a Basic Allowance for 2024-25 of £4,874, representing a 3% increase;**
- 2) a range of Special Responsibility Allowances as set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes, with the addition of the SRA for the role of Chair of a Scrutiny Task Group of £1,183;**

- 3) that travel allowances for 2024-25 continue to be paid in accordance with the HMRC mileage allowance;
- 4) that subsistence allowances for 2024-25 remain unchanged;
- 5) that the Dependent Carer's Allowance remains unchanged;
- 6) that travel and subsistence payments made by Parish Councils to councillors (where they are paid) are made in accordance with the provisions set out in this report; and
- 7) that these changes to the Members Allowances Scheme for 2024/25 be backdated to take effect from 7th May 2024 onwards.

7. PRODUCTIVITY PLANS

The Section 151 Officer and Deputy Chief Executive presented the Productivity Plan for the Council for the Committee's consideration.

Members were informed that in April 2024 the then Minister for Local Government had written to local authority Chief Executives thanking Councils for the financial savings that they had delivered over the years. Local Government was the only part the public sector that had consistently managed to deliver financial savings and this had been recognised. Chief Executives had been advised that the Government was reviewing the productivity of public services and wanted to gather information about what was and wasn't working, which would inform plans moving forward.

Whilst no template had been provided for responses, Councils had been asked to limit their replies to four pages in length. Some local authorities had opted to draft a one-page document but Officers at Redditch Borough Council had produced a more comprehensive document which was four pages in length. It was acknowledged that there had recently been a change in Government, however, it was understood that the productivity plans still needed to be prepared and submitted to the Department of Housing, Communities and Local Government (DHCLG) by 19th July 2024. The plans needed to detail how the Council had transformed services, how technology was used for the delivery of services, how wasteful spend had been reduced and the barriers that were in place that restricted further progress from being made.

Members were asked to note that the following information had been highlighted in the Council's Productivity Plan:

- The significant levels of financial savings that had been achieved by the Council as a result of working in shared services with other Councils, particularly Bromsgrove District Council, over a number of years.
- The use of ICT software to automate services where appropriate.
- The use of benchmarking data to help drive forward improvements in services.
- The use of capital reinvestment in services.
- The impact of procurement and legacy processes as a barrier to further progress.
- The barriers relating to the Government, specifically the lack of communication between Government departments which often impacted negatively at the local government level.

During consideration of this item, Members were asked to note that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had pre-scrutinised the report at a meeting held on 8th July 2024. Whilst the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had not proposed any specific recommendations on this subject, Members had noted a typographical error, whereby the report had referred to “polar panels” rather than “solar panels”. Members were advised that this would be addressed prior to the submission of the Productivity Plan to the Government.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed the content and in doing so congratulated Officers for their hard work managing Council services over the years. Members commented on the reductions in Government funding that had been allocated to local government over consecutive years and the impact that this had had on Councils. In this context, it was noted that the Council had done well to have not had to make significant cuts to services delivered at the local level.

Consideration was given to the value of the productivity plan and the extent to which these were likely to be required following the general election. Members commented that the exercise had been useful, insofar as they had been able to reflect on what the Council already delivered. This would help in identifying opportunities to generate income and to achieve further efficiencies moving forward.

RECOMMENDED that

the Productivity Plan be approved, the plan to be published on the Council’s website and forwarded to the Department of Housing, Communities and Local Government before the 19th July 2024.

8. **COMBINED FINANCIAL OUTTURN AND QUARTER 4 REVENUE MONITORING 2023/2024 (INCLUDING UPDATE ON THE FLEET)**

The Section 151 Officer presented the Combined Financial Outturn and Quarter 4 Revenue Monitoring Report 2023/24 (Including Update on the Fleet) for the Committee's consideration.

During the presentation of this report, the following points were highlighted:

- The Council was projected to have a £386,000 overspend at the end of the 2023/24 financial year, which was only £3,000 more than the figures that had been anticipated at the end of the third quarter.
- A key reason for the overspend had been costs arising due to issues with the Council's vehicle fleet.
- Another major cause of the overspend had been the financial costs arising from the pay award to staff.
- The Council's long-term debt remained at a total of £104 million, which was due to the transfer into the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 20 years previously.
- The Council had not had to borrow funding for a long time, with purchases having been paid for in recent years using cash balances. It was possible that this situation would need to change in order to fund purchases of replacement vehicles in the fleet.
- The authority had only spent £3.2 million of the total £12 million capital budget. This area would need to be reviewed going forward, although Members were asked to note that delays had been caused due to competition for raw materials and for contractors' time.
- The HRA budget was in a breakeven position, although there had been a slight overspend on the HRA capital budget.
- Council Tax collection rates had recovered to a level almost equivalent to collection rates prior to the Covid pandemic. Members were asked to note that, like many authorities in the country, there had been a decrease in collection rates during the pandemic.
- There were four key areas where additional funding would be requested from Council:
 - Funding to purchase new vehicles for the fleet. Previously, the Council had planned to maintain existing vehicles whilst waiting for clarity from the Government on future requirements of waste and recycling vehicles. Electric, hybrid and hydrogen powered vehicles were all more expensive than diesel powered vehicles. However, guidance had not yet been issued by the Government on this subject and maintenance costs for the Council's existing fleet had been higher than anticipated. Therefore,

Officers were proposing to start replacing some of the vehicles and this would require financial investment.

- There had been a high-profile funeral held at Redditch crematorium in June 2024 which had been well attended by people in person and remotely. Those watching the live stream of the funeral had highlighted problems with the audibility of the sound system. Given the sensitivities associated with this service area, it was recognised that there was a need to invest in improvements to the sound system which were likely to cost circa £20,000.
- Members of the Executive Committee were keen to introduce a street market. This would be at a cost of an additional £38,000 per annum to the Council.
- Similarly, members of the Executive Committee had requested a reduction in Dial a Ride fares, at a cost of £44,000 per annum.
- There had been a surplus budget reported to Council in February 2024 when the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) had been set. The proposed additions to the budget would reduce that surplus to closer to £17,000, which would be returned to balances.
- The accounts for 2020/21 had been submitted and in doing so Officers had found that the Council's general fund position was £1.2 million higher than had previously been anticipated.

Members subsequently discussed the report in detail and in doing so welcomed news that the Council's 2020/21 accounts had finally been submitted. Moving forward, it was noted that Council budgets had been impacted by significant rises in inflation in recent years and there remained a need to be prudent when managing the Council's budget. Furthermore, Members noted that there were risks that could potentially have a negative impact on the Council's budget position, including high demand for temporary housing and the impacts of competing with other organisations for raw materials on the potential for the Council to deliver key projects according to deadline.

RESOLVED to note

- 1) the 2023/24 provisional outturn position in relation to revenue budgets was a projected revenue overspend of £386k after applying £557k from the Utilities Reserve as approved at Quarter 1. (Quarter 3 was £383k);**
- 2) the 2023/24 provisional outturn position in relation to Capital expenditure was £3.2m against a total an approved programme of £10.9m. (Quarter 3 was £2.586m);**

- 3) the provisional outturn position in respect of the General Fund Reserves, which would stand at £3.721m on the 31st March 2024;
- 4) the provisional outturn position in respect of Earmarked Reserves;
- 5) HRA net revenue expenditure was break even at £0.0m (same as at Quarter 3) and Capital Expenditure was £0.2m more than budget (Quarter 3 was a £105k underspend);
- 6) at the time of writing, the Council was yet to formally close its accounts for the 2021/22 and 2022/23 financial years. 2020/21 had been closed and submitted for public inspection but not audited. This could therefore result in adjustments to actual income and expenditure in those years and could have a consequential impact on the 2023/24 accounts; and
- 7) work continued to refine the position including addressing the backlog of entries that were in suspense and any miscoding from 2021/2 through to 2023/4, therefore the provisional position detailed in this report was subject to change and a further update would be presented to Members in due course.

RESOLVED that (subject to Council approving the overall funding):

- 8) the Dial a Ride, crematorium sound system and market schemes, as shown at paragraphs 3.26 – 3.29, be approved; and
- 9) Executive approve the revised fleet replacement programme.

RECOMMENDED that:

- 10) the reprofiling of the Capital Fleet Replacement budget, relating to the Domestic Waste Collection Service, be approved;
- 11) the underspend position as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), to be reduced by £81k to fund the crematorium sound system, street market and Dial A Ride change, be approved; and
- 12) subject to the agreement of recommendation 8, the consequential reduction of Dial a Ride charges to £2.50

and medical fares to £3.50, in the Council's Fees and Charges Scheme, be approved.

9. QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT 2023/24

The Section 151 Officer and Deputy Chief Executive presented the Quarter 4 Performance Monitoring Report 2023/24.

The report detailed the performance of Council services in relation to the Council's existing strategic purposes and measures. Data was also provided in the report in relation to some operational measures.

Members were asked to note that this was the final time in which the report would be presented for the Executive Committee's consideration in this format. Performance monitoring would be continuing, as this was recognised as a valuable tool for the authority. However, the layout and content of the report would be different.

During consideration of this item, the following matters detailed within the report were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- There had been a reduction in the number of vacant shop units since quarter 3 of 2023/24.
- There had been overall reductions in levels of crime reported in the Borough.
- Information had been included in the report regarding the performance of Rubicon Leisure Limited.
- Staff turnover was 8 per cent by the date of the meeting, which was lower than the national average of 16 per cent. This appeared to imply that actions that were being taken to attract and retain staff at the authority were having some success.
- There had been significant success reported in terms of gas safety compliance.
- Managers had been tasked with developing service business plans which would need to be informed by the Council's strategic priorities whilst also shaping personal development and performance management at an individual level for the organisation's employees.

The content of the report was subsequently discussed and welcomed by the Committee. Members commented that it would be important for all Portfolio Holders to work with the Portfolio Holder for Performance, who would have a cross-cutting role helping colleagues to monitor the performance of services within their remit.

Members noted that work was due to commence on developing a new Council Plan for the authority. This would outline new priorities and measures for the Council. Executive Committee members would have a role to play in developing the content of this plan.

During consideration of this item, reference was made to the contribution that had been made to the Borough by Community Builders. Members requested further information about who directed the work of the Officers in Community Builder roles and how their work could be managed and redirected. Officers undertook to provide a response to this query outside the meeting.

RESOLVED that

the Quarter 4 Performance data for the period January to March 2024 be noted.

10. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Members considered the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 14th March 2024. It was noted that the following recommendation had been made at that meeting during consideration of an overview of social housing repairs:

“Recommended that the Executive Committee consider the report on social housing repairs (as presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14th March 2024), together with the minutes record of that meeting, in the new municipal year.”

In considering this recommendation, Members were asked to note that the Executive Committee already received Overview and Scrutiny Committee minutes as a standing item on the agenda. Therefore, the key issue to consider was whether the Executive Committee also wished to receive the report that had already been presented on this subject to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for noting.

The recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was discussed. Members thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for considering the subject and noted that this topic had been debated in some significant detail in March 2024. It was noted that there were due to be housing briefings later in the year and the subject of social housing repairs might be addressed as part of that process.

At the end of a discussion in respect of this recommendation, Members decided to note the minutes of the meeting of the

Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14th March 2024 which contained reference to this recommendation.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 14th March 2024 be noted.

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

The Executive Committee considered the following recommendation that had been proposed at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 8th July 2024:

“The Executive Committee further review the Council’s constitution with a further check on policy to enable past Executive Members to participate in Overview and Scrutiny when they were previously involved in Executive decisions.”

Clarification was provided that this recommendation had been made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in a context in which the Committee had been discussing the overview and scrutiny work programme for the 2024/25 municipal year. Concerns had been raised about the Overview and Scrutiny Procedural Rules in the Council’s constitution, which did not permit Members to scrutinise a decision in which he or she had been directly involved.

During consideration of this item, legal guidance was requested from the Council’s Principal Solicitor for Governance in respect of this matter. The Executive Committee was advised that there was no specific rule contained within the legislation on this subject. However, statutory guidance published by the Government in April 2024 in respect of Overview and Scrutiny required Councils to clarify in their constitutions how conflicts of interest between Executive and Scrutiny responsibilities should be managed, including where Members stood down from the Executive and moved to a Scrutiny role. The Overview and Scrutiny Procedural Rules in the Council’s constitution addressed this through reference to restrictions placed on Members not being permitted to scrutinise decisions with which they had been previously involved. There was the potential to refer these rules to the Constitutional Review Working Party (CRWP) for review. However, there would remain a need to demonstrate that Members of Overview and Scrutiny were impartial and that potential conflicts of interest were managed.

Advice had also been requested from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS), which was the lead organisation nationally with expertise in the field of Overview and Scrutiny. The CfGS had

advised that it would not be appropriate for Members to be involved in scrutiny relating to implementation of a decision made when they were an Executive Committee member.

Members discussed the advice that had been received in respect of this recommendation and in so doing commented on how Overview and Scrutiny was a valued part of the local democratic process. The Committee noted that there was a need to be open and transparent when making decisions and for this to be subject to scrutiny by Members acting as critical friends. Whilst Members expressed sympathy with the difficulties that some former Executive Committee Members might encounter scrutinising some decisions, Members also commented that it was important to comply with best practice and to have robust governance procedures in place. For these reasons, the Committee agreed that it would not be appropriate to approve this recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

However, in reaching this position, the Executive Committee noted that any Members particularly impacted by this requirement in the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules could arrange for the substitutes to attend meetings on their behalf. Furthermore, it was noted that former Executive Committee Members might not have been present when particular decisions were taken meaning that they could potentially participate in scrutiny of some subjects that had recently been considered by the Executive Committee. Therefore any restrictions on participation would need to be assessed on a case by case basis.

To ensure that the reasons why the Executive Committee had reached these conclusions were clear, Members requested that their decision and the rationale for their decision in respect of this matter should be reported as soon as possible for the consideration of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED that

based on legal advice and requirements in the Statutory Guidance for Overview and Scrutiny, the current Overview and Scrutiny Procedural Rules in respect of scrutiny of Executive decisions with which Members have previously been involved be noted.

12. APPOINTMENTS TO THE SHAREHOLDERS COMMITTEE

The following Members of the Executive Committee were nominated to serve as Members of the Shareholders Committee:

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 9th July, 2024

- Councillor Sharon Harvey (Chair)
- Councillor Bill Hartnett (Vice Chair)
- Councillor Joe Baker
- Councillor Jen Snape
- Councillor Ian Woodall

Members noted that only Executive Committee members could be appointed to serve as voting Members on this Committee. This was due to a decision that had been taken earlier in the calendar year, following a governance review, to change this body from a Committee that had reported directly to Council to a sub-Committee of the Executive Committee. This change had been made in line with best practice for Shareholder Committees for Council companies.

Reference was made to the fact that the Portfolio Holder for Leisure was not being nominated as a member of the Committee. The Leader advised that this would ensure that the Portfolio Holder remained independent from Rubicon Leisure Limited but Members were assured that she would continue to be appraised of the work of the company.

RESOLVED that

the following Members of the Executive Committee be appointed to serve on the Shareholders Committee during the 2024/25 municipal year: Councillor Sharon Harvey (Chair), Councillor Bill Hartnett (Vice Chair) and Councillors Joe Baker, Jen Snape and Ian Woodall.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.45 pm