

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Juma Begum (Mayor), Councillor Joanna Kane (Deputy Mayor), and Councillors Joe Baker, Juliet Barker Smith, William Boyd, Brandon Clayton, Claire Davies, Matthew Dormer, James Fardoe, Andrew Fry, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Chris Holz, Sid Khan, Wanda King, Sachin Mathur, Gemma Monaco, David Munro, Rita Rogers, Gary Slim, Jen Snape, Jane Spilsbury, Monica Stringfellow, Craig Warhurst, Ian Woodall and Paul Wren

Also Present:

Mrs Karen Ashley

Officers:

Peter Carpenter, Claire Felton and Sue Hanley

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

40. WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all those present to the meeting.

41. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Alan Mason.

42. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Brandon Clayton declared an other disclosable interest in respect of Minute Item No. 46 – Motions on Notice. The Motion that had been submitted related to the Winter Fuel Allowance and Councillor Clayton advised that he was eligible to claim this allowance. However, he advised that he intended to remain present for the debate for that item and to vote thereon.

43. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on Monday 16th September 2024 were considered. Members noted that there was one typographical error in the minutes, whereby it should have been recorded that there had been no Questions on Notice rather than no Motions on Notice considered at the previous meeting of Council.

RESOLVED that

Subject to the amendment detailed in the preamble above, the minutes of the meeting of Council held on Monday 16th September 2024 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Mayor.

44. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following announcements were made during the Council meeting:

a) The Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor advised that she had attended a significant number of engagements since the previous Council meeting. Of particular note, were the Remembrance Sunday commemorations, observed on Sunday 10th November 2024. Members thanked the Mayor for the speech she had delivered at this event, which Members commented had been kind and considerate.

During consideration of the Mayor's announcements, Members also thanked the Deputy Mayor for attending the Remembrance Sunday commemorations that had been held in Astwood Bank on Sunday 10th November 2024.

Members were informed that the Mayor was due to host a Bollywood night on Friday 15th November 2024. All Members were invited to attend this event, which would help to raise funds for the Mayor's charity. In addition, Members were encouraged to book teams to attend the Council staff quiz, which was due to take place on Friday 13th December 2024.

b) The Leader's Announcements

The Leader advised that he had also attended the Remembrance Sunday commemorations in Redditch town centre on Sunday 10th November 2024 as well as a Remembrance Day event at Plymouth Road cemetery on

Monday 11th November 2024. In both cases, the events had been well organised and attended.

Since the previous meeting of Council, the Leader had attended a meeting with representatives of the District Council Network (DCN), which had focused on the subject of devolution. This meeting had been well attended and questions had been raised about the Government's intentions in respect of devolution. A Government white paper in respect of this matter was due to be published in due course. Following this meeting, the Leader had met with the Mayor of the West Midlands Region, Mr Richard Parker, alongside the Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Chief Executive, to discuss the potential role for the Council in terms of devolution in the West Midlands region.

At the end of October 2024, the Leader and Deputy Leader had attended the Local Government Association's (LGA) Conference. One of the highlights of the conference had been a talk delivered by former Olympian, Ms Fatima Whitbread MBE, about her experiences in the care system. This had highlighted a lot of useful information about the role of elected Members as Corporate Parents and their safeguarding responsibilities as part of this role.

c) The Chief Executive's Announcements

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

45. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 9)

The following Question on Notice, which had been submitted for consideration in advance of the meeting, was read out by Mrs Karen Ashley:

"In your local election manifesto you said that we could look forward to a brand new outdoor market. Proper stalls selling quality merchandise. Can I ask when Redditch residents can expect this to be delivered as we were given the impression it would be for December this year."

In responding to the question, the Leader advised that it had originally been anticipated that the outdoor market could have been reintroduced by December 2024. However, following investigation by Officers, it had been discovered that there was a need to reinstate the electricity supply to the market area which was removed during the public realm works in the town. This work would take some time to complete and therefore it would not be

possible to launch the new market in December and it would instead open in March 2025. The Leader also explained that he had requested that a market group, to which Members would be appointed, should be established, which would be able to help monitor progress.

Mrs Ashley subsequently asked the following supplementary question:

“Could you explain why there is no indoor market and will you go on the radio to let the public know what is happening?”

The Leader commented that the decision to close the market had been taken some time ago under a previous administration. The market stall holders had had an independent arrangement with the Kingfisher Shopping Centre which did not involve Redditch Borough Council. The Kingfisher Shopping Centre was managed as a business and had other plans for the future use of the unit that had been utilised until recently by the market stall holders.

In terms of communication, the Leader advised that he posted a lot of updates on his social media accounts. The Leader also explained that he would be issuing a statement after the Council meeting.

46. MOTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 11)

The following Motion on Notice was presented by Councillor Matthew Dormer at the meeting:

“Council resolves to

Request that the Council Leader write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer condemning their actions and requesting:

- That the Government acknowledges the importance of the Winter Fuel Allowance in protecting the health and wellbeing of pensioners.
- That the Government reinstates the Winter Fuel Allowance to all pensioners.
- That the Government commits to maintaining this allowance to prevent future risk to the elderly population during winter months.

And Council asks the Executive Committee to ensure that:

- The Council proactively promotes the Government’s awareness campaign and the Pension Credit Toolkit to alert those eligible of Pension Credit which in some respects will

help access to the Winter Fuel Payment for those most in need.

- The Council encourages local efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through council services and partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all eligible pensioners in Redditch, Astwood Bank and Feckenham are supported in claiming their entitlement.
- The Council offers all Members the opportunity to sign the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK."

The Motion was proposed by Councillor Dormer and seconded by Councillor Gemma Monaco.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Dormer commented that there were circa 16,000 residents in the Borough who were eligible to receive the Winter Fuel Allowance. Consequently, a lot of Redditch residents would be impacted by changes to the rules in respect of this matter. Members were asked to note that the estimated costs nationally of continuing with current arrangements would be £1.2 billion, which he suggested was not too substantial when compared to other public service costs.

In seconding this Motion, Councillor Monaco explained that the Motion was asking for a letter to be written by the Leader on behalf of the Council to the Government to express Members' concerns. Councillor Monaco commented that she had been contacted by residents about this situation and she expressed particular concerns about those pensioners who would not meet the threshold to receive pension credit but who might still struggle financially due to a change to the rules for the Winter Fuel Allowance.

During consideration of this item, an amendment was proposed to the wording of the Motion by Councillor Claire Davies. This proposal was to add the following words to the end of the second bullet point in the Motion: "*...and instead increases taxes for millionaires and multi-millionaires.*" However, this proposal was not seconded and was also not accepted by the proposer of the original Motion and therefore was not debated.

A further proposal was made by the Leader to amend the Motion so as to only refer to the fourth and fifth bullet points. This proposal was made on the basis that these were elements that it was suggested the Council could influence effectively. However, the proposer of the Motion did not agree to this suggestion and therefore it was not taken forward.

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

- The financial difficulties experienced by some pensioners and the impact that changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance would have on people in this position.
- The Motion on Notice that had been considered on a similar subject at a recent full Council meeting held at Worcester County Council.
- The work of the Council to promote pension credit to local residents.
- The extent to which there were local pensioners who were eligible to receive pension credit but who were not aware of this or did not claim this support.
- The role of elected Members in helping to promote pension credit to local pensioners.
- The financial difficulties that might be experienced by pensioners who were not eligible to receive pension credit.
- The support that could be provided by Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), to help people manage their personal finances.
- The support that could be provided by the Worcestershire Household Support Fund to residents with managing debts and energy costs.
- The additional Household Support Funding for the period April 2025 to March 2026 that had been announced by the Government in the budget statement to support people with managing household expenditure.
- The potential for all Members to write to the Government regarding this matter.
- The extent to which an equality impact assessment should have been undertaken at the national level in respect of this matter.
- The ongoing cost of living crisis in the UK.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was defeated.

(During consideration of this item, there was a brief adjournment, from 19.37 – 19.43pm.

Prior to consideration of this item, Councillor Brandon Clayton declared an other disclosable interest as he advised that he was eligible to claim the Winter Fuel Allowance. However, he commented that he intended to remain present for the debate for that item and he voted thereon.)

47. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Members considered recommendations arising from the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday 15th October 2024.

Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy

Members noted that the strategy had been subject to pre-scrutiny at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14th October 2024. There had been general support for the strategy at both this meeting and at the meeting of the Executive Committee.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Monica Stringfellow and seconded by Councillor Jen Snape.

Redditch Borough Council Response to Proposed Reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and Other Changes to the Planning System

Members discussed the Council's response to the Government consultation in respect of proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework. It was noted that the consultation process and response had been discussed in detail at meetings of the Planning Advisory Panel (PAP) and all Members had had an opportunity to contribute to this debate.

The consultation process was discussed and some Members raised concerns about the amount of time that had been made available to Councils to respond to the Government in this process. Reference was made to the importance of the green belt to the Borough and Members commented that it was important to preserve this as much as possible moving forward. However, it was also noted that a significant proportion of land in the country remained agricultural land which was not due to be developed for housing. There was also the potential for housing development to have a positive impact on the local economy.

During consideration of this item, Members also commented on the need for more housing, particularly social and affordable housing, in the country. It was noted that unfortunately, there were properties in the country that were in a poor state of disrepair and the conditions in these properties could impact on people's health and wellbeing. New properties, built to meet higher building standards than in the past and to a standard that could be rated as Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C or above would result in both health benefits and financial benefits to residents in a cost of living crisis. The suggestion was made that any houses that were developed in Redditch needed to take into account carbon reduction measures and should ideally be built on brownfield sites, wherever possible.

Consideration was given to the debate in respect of this matter that had occurred at the meeting of the Executive Committee held on

15th October 2024. Members commented that it had been highlighted at this point that Officers had already submitted a response to the Government by this stage as the Government's deadline for responses had already passed prior to the date of the Executive Committee meeting.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Joe Baker and seconded by Councillor Sharon Harvey.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 15th October 2024 be received and all recommendations adopted.

48. REGULATORY COMMITTEES

Members considered a recommendation that had been made at a meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 7th October 2024 in respect of the Gambling Act 2005 – Review of Statement of Principles and consideration of consultation responses. Council was advised that there had been unanimous support amongst Members for this recommendation when it had been proposed at that meeting of the Committee.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Sachin Mathur and seconded by Councillor Juliet Barker Smith

RESOLVED that

the draft Statement of Licencing Principles be approved and published with effect from 31st January 2025.

49. SECTION 151 OFFICER REPORT

Members considered a report concerning the position of Section 151 Officer at the Council.

Council was advised that the authority, along with Bromsgrove District Council, was in the process of recruiting a new Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service and a new Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer respectively. The Council's current Section 151 Officer, Mr Carpenter, was due to come to the end of his contract by the end of the month. The proposal was being made that his contract should be extended to enable him to remain in post until a new Section 151 Officer had been appointed and commenced employment with the Council.

During consideration of this item, Members thanked Mr Carpenter for his hard work whilst in post and for agreeing to continue in post whilst the Council went through the ongoing recruitment process. Members also thanked Mr Carpenter and the Financial Services team for their hard work on the Council's accounts.

The recommendation were proposed by Councillor Joe Baker and seconded by Councillor Ian Woodall.

RESOLVED to NOTE that

- 1) **Members of Bromsgrove District Council (the employing authority) resolved at the Council meeting held on 9th October 2024 that Mr Peter Carpenter continue to be appointed as the Deputy Chief Executive and Interim Executive Director of Resources (Section 151 Officer) until such time as a new permanent Section 151 Officer commences employment with the Council;**
- 2) **Further, that during this extended period of employment Mr Peter Carpenter will be made available by Bromsgrove District Council under the shared services arrangements to perform such duties as are required by his post for Redditch Borough Council; and**

and RESOLVED that

- 3) **For the purposes of Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972, Mr Peter Carpenter continue to be appointed as Section 151 Officer for Redditch Borough Council until such time as a new permanent Section 151 Officer is appointed and commences employment.**

(Prior to consideration of this item, Mr Peter Carpenter left the room and was not present during the debate and vote thereon.)

50. JOINT APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE REPORT

Council considered a report concerning the structure of the Joint Appointments Committee and Sub-Committees.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Joe Baker and seconded by Councillor Sharon Harvey.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Joint Appointments Committee (JAC) should have a standing sub-committee to deal with disciplinary matters**

on its behalf, which will replace the current Statutory Officers Disciplinary Action Panel;

- 2) responsibility for the functions carried out by the Employment Appeals Committee and the Statutory Officers Disciplinary Action Committee be transferred to the JAC and its sub-committee(s);
- 3) the Committee Terms of Reference (Part 3 of the constitution) be updated to reflect the creation of the JAC and the transfer to it of the functions currently carried out by the Employment Appeals Committee, and the Statutory Officers Disciplinary Action Panel.
- 4) to authorise the Monitoring Officer to update the Constitution, including any consequential amendments required as a result of the above.

51. POLITICAL BALANCE REPORT

Members considered a report updating Council on changes to the political balance.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Joe Baker and seconded by Councillor Sharon Harvey.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Political balance of the Committees of the Council be agreed; and
- 2) appointments by political group leaders to the places on each Committee etc. be noted.

52. URGENT BUSINESS - RECORD OF DECISIONS

Members noted that one urgent decision had been taken since the previous meeting of Council concerning the authority's decision not to defend the appeal in relation to Planning Application 21/01830/FUL.

53. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

There was no urgent business for consideration on this occasion.

Council

Monday, 11th November, 2024

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.28 pm