

MINUTES

Present:

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

Officers:

Peter Carpenter, Nicola Cummings, Helen Oakes, Simon Parry, Guy Revans, Andrew Rainbow, Darren Whitney and Judith Willis

56. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

57. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

58. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader advised that at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13th January 2025, Members pre-scrutinised the following items scheduled for consideration at the Executive Committee Meeting:

- Item 5: Food Waste Business Case and Associated Waste Related Issues
- Item 6: Damp and Mould Additional Resources
- Item 7: Housing Ombudsman's Findings Report
- Item 10: Independent Remuneration Panel's Recommendations

At the end of their discussions, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted and endorsed the recommendations for first three items and added a specific recommendation for item 10 which was "*that the basic allowance and special responsibility allowances (SRAs) should be increased by approximately the rate of inflation.*"

Chair

At a meeting of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group held on 9th January 2025, Members pre-scrutinised the following reports:

- Item 8: Final Council Tax Support Scheme 2025/26
- Item 9: Council Tax Base 2025/26
- Item 11: Medium Term Financial Plan Tranche 1
- Item 15: HRA Rent Setting 2025/26

The group did not propose any recommendations.

On behalf of the Executive Committee, the Leader thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Budget Scrutiny Working Group for their hard work in pre-scrutinising these reports.

59. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 26th November 2024 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

60. FOOD WASTE BUSINESS CASE AND ASSOCIATED WASTE RELATED ISSUES

The Assistant Director Environmental & Housing Property Services presented the report on the Introduction of Food Waste Collections.

The Committee was informed that there were a number of factors to consider as part of the introduction of food waste collections including delays from Government in funding, issues with capacity within the Operating Licence for the vehicles needed to deliver the service in house as well as physical restrictions within the depot. There was also the risk of the volume of residents that participated in the scheme.

Options were summarised for the delivery of the service however officers were recommending outsourcing the service with a joint tender from this Authority, Bromsgrove District Council and Wyre Forest District Council over a period of eight years.

Members were in favour of supporting the recommendations and noted that even if the tender did not work out there would be time to consider other options.

The Executive Director noted that officers would work on a twin stream basis to look at running in-house, as a back-up, to mitigate the risk if the tender did not provide a viable solution.

The Leader thanked the Assistant Director Environmental & Housing Property Services and colleagues for the work on this.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Subject to the outcome of negotiations, the introduction of a joint Food Waste Collection Service be approved, working with Bromsgrove District Council and Wyre Forest District Council to deliver the authority's statutory duties under the Environment Act 2021 regarding a Food Waste Collection service;**
- 2) Delegated authority be granted to the Assistant Director of Environmental and Housing Property Services following consultation with the Section 151 Officer, the Principal Solicitor (Contracts, Commercial and Procurement) and the Portfolio Holders for Finance and Environmental Services respectively, subject to the agreement of recommendations 1 and 3, to:**
 - a) negotiate and agree terms with Bromsgrove District Council and Wyre Forest District Council to enter into a joint tender for a shared food waste collection service;**
 - b) tender and award a dedicated weekly food waste collection service through a third party for a period of 8 years commencing no later than 31 March 2026.**

RECOMMENDED that:

- 3) The Council allocate £500,000 Revenue Funding in the Medium-Term Financial Plan as an operational budget from 2026/27 to fund the Food Waste Collection Service in the Borough, as accounted for within tranche 1 of the budget.**

61. DAMP AND MOULD ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Interim Housing Property Services Manager presented the report on the subject of Damp and Mould Additional Resources.

The Committee were informed that this was a national issue and not just a local one and establishing a Damp and Mould Team would put the Authority ahead of the curve.

Members were referred to the business case in the appendix and the officer noted that as the report outlined, investing in a damp and mould team aligned with the Council's commitment to providing safe and habitable homes for residents.

Members welcomed the report, and the Leader noted the responsibility for the Council to look after its residents and that this was a good way forward. Particularly if education was included which had been discussed at the last Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

The Portfolio Holder took the opportunity to thank officers for their work and echoed the Leader's comments adding that even though some properties were more susceptible to mould and damp, the expertise of the new team would reduce response times, increase the safety of residents and save money in the long run.

The Leader also thanked the Officers and commented that the Council was leading the way.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Subject to approval of recommendation 2, Members approve the contents of the Damp and Mould Business Case and the establishment of a Damp and Mould Team.**

RECOMMENDED that

- 2) **£115,770 be released from the HRA budget for the financial year 2024/25 to cover the costs of the new team and that thereafter the costs summarised at paragraph 4.3 of the report of £463,078 be met from the HRA budget.**

62. HOUSING OMBUDSMAN'S FINDINGS REPORT

The report on the Housing Ombudsman Findings was presented by the Deputy Monitoring Officer.

The Committee were asked to note the findings, orders and recommendations from the Housing Ombudsman. The Deputy Monitoring Officer mentioned findings listed in paragraph 2.2 relating to severe maladministration in the Council's response to damp and mould and reports of a ticking noise and paragraphs 2.3 and 2.4 regarding maladministration for the Council's response to repairs and complaint handling.

It was further noted that the orders and recommended actions had been completed and the case was closed by the Housing Ombudsman on 13th November 2024.

The Assistant Director Environmental & Housing Property Services made an apology from the Housing Service. He noted the many failings that had occurred in this case and informed the Executive Committee of number of changes that had been subsequently incorporated. These included a review of capacity and premises, a noise policy review, better recording of cases, training on supporting vulnerable tenants and, a programme of visits to each property to identify any issues that the customer raised.

The Leader accepted the apology on behalf of the Executive Committee and noted how upsetting it was when things went wrong. He noted that organisations made mistakes but it was how they were dealt with was what counted. It was upsetting that things went as far as they did but was comforted in the fact that steps had been taken so that this did not happen again.

A Member echoed the Leader's comments and noted disappointment but welcomed the training of staff as long as it was maintained. They had spoken to the Chief Executive regarding

equalities and were pleased to note equalities being used in committee reports.

They further noted that it was good that this was being taken seriously but that it could not happen again and asked officers what had changed to ensure this.

The Assistant Director Environmental & Housing Property Services responded that data was being used in a more robust way including better monitoring of performance and trends on Complaints to make sure standards were not slipping.

The question was asked if there had been any disciplinary action taken and officers responded in the fact no individual was culpable, but that the failings were across the service.

The Leader then commented that there was a responsibility for all, Members as well as officers, to make sure complaints were dealt with as soon as possible but also to pass on praise in the same timely fashion.

The Leader thanked those involved in the report.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The findings, orders and recommendations from the Housing Ombudsman be noted.**
- 2) Compliance with those matters by the Council and the wider learning points be noted.**

63. FINAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2025/2026

The report Final Council Tax Support Scheme 2025/2026 was presented by the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer.

The Committee were informed that the Council Tax Support Scheme had not changed to the one approved last year and was set out in Appendix A. The only difference was that the whole scheme had been uprated by 1.7% in line with the approved increases in national benefits.

The Council bought in this scheme (banded) in 2021 and the full review undertaken in the last year's budget suggested that most Councils now use this type of matrix.

For reference spending was circa £5 million on Council Tax Support through the collection fund, with 70% paid for by Worcestershire County Council (WCC), 13% paid for by Redditch Borough Council, 12% paid for by the Police and 5% by Fire.

There were circa 2,400 pension aged people receiving Council Tax Support (paid for by the Government) and 3,500 Working Aged.

The Portfolio Holder was happy to endorse the recommendations, and it was supported by other Members of the Executive Committee.

RECOMMENDED that

the Council Tax reduction Scheme be retained for the 2025-26 tax year, subject to uprating of income bands by 1.7% in-line with increases to national benefits as set out in the table at Appendix A.

64. COUNCIL TAX BASE 2025/2026

The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer presented the Council Tax Base 2025/2026 report to the Committee.

Members were informed that this was a statutory report required to allow precepting authorities to calculate how much Council Tax they would raise in the upcoming year.

It was based on data on the Council Tax system as at the 30th November 2024 and adjusted for the following:

- The latest dwelling numbers
- Discounts and Exemptions such as Council Tax Support
- An allowance of 1% for non-collection (and the Councils in year collection rate was approximately 98%).
- The new Council Tax base was 26,455.5 Band "D" equivalent properties (last year it was 26,317.1)

There was 1 Parish in Redditch, Feckenham. Its Band “D” equivalent figure as part of this total was 382.1 – up from 380.3 last year.

Members welcomed the report, and the Leader thanked the Officers involved.

RECOMMENDED that

1) The calculation of the council tax base for the whole and parts of the area for 2025/26 be approved; and

2) In accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the figures calculated by Redditch Borough Council as its tax base for the whole area be 26,455.5 and for the parts of the area listed below be.

Parish of Feckenham	382.1
Rest of Redditch	26,073.4
Total for the Borough	26,455.5

65. INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS

The Independent Remuneration Panel Recommendations report was presented by the Electoral Services Manager.

The Committee were informed that the panel were recommending a basic allowance of £5,826 which was a 5.58% increase on their recommendation for last year. If the Council were to agree with this, it would be an increase of 19.6% on the current basic allowance.

It was noted that the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) only recommend one Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) and have different multipliers for Audit Chair and Opposition Political Group Leaders.

It was further noted that Members should pay regard to the report but did not have to accept any of the recommendations.

The Leader had met with the Chair of the IRP and discussed the figures and noted that the Council was behind a lot of other Authorities in terms of remuneration.

The Leader thanked the Panel and officers for the work they had done this year on the remuneration.

Members discussed the report and whilst realising the need to increase allowances decided on recommending an increase of the basic allowance by 2.9%. Members also decided to freeze SRAs for 2025/26.

RECOMMENDED that

Redditch Borough Council adopts the following:

- 1. An increase of 2.9% to the current Basic Allowance for 2025/26.**
 - 2. A freeze on the current Special Responsibility Allowances for 2025/26.**
 - 3. That travel allowances for 2025/26 continue to be paid in accordance with the HMRC mileage allowance**
 - 4. That subsistence allowances for 2025/26 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**
- 66. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN - TRANCHE 1 BUDGET INCLUDING FEES AND CHARGES (FOLLOWING CONSULTATION)**

The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer presented the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Tranche 1 Budget including Fees and Charges (following consultation).

Members were informed that at the Executive Committee meeting held on 26th November, Tranche 1 of the MTFP (Prior to Consultation) had been considered by Members. It was proposed that the recommendations of that report, following the consultation period now be recommended to Council.

The Council had consulted on its Tranche 1 Budget. This budget consultation opened on 5th December 2024. An email invite was sent to the Redditch Community Panel. The survey was also promoted on a variety of social media channels.

The survey closed at 12noon on 2nd January 2025. The response rate for the community panel was 44%; there were a total of 322 valid responses received.

Question 2 gave a split of the consultation responses by location with the highest percentage of returns coming from Webheath, Batchley and Headless Cross.

Question 17 gave the splits of Age Ranges of the people who filled out the questionnaire. The vast majority were over 50.

The survey asked respondents to rank the three most important services they felt the Council should invest in. These were:

- Community Safety (49.2.% of respondents).
- Maintenance of the Landscape and Environment (46.1.% of respondents)
- Housing (42.1.% of respondents).

Each question had the following Questions asked had the following possible responses:

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

In those questions, 8 had responses well over 50% agreeing or strongly agreeing, and only one had a response lower than 50%:

- Do you support fees and charges (such as hire costs) rising by 4% to keep them in line with inflation and rising staffing costs at a 47.7% approval rate.

The highest approval rating, at 84.1% was the question - Do you agree that the Council should invest in its land and assets to ensure

they are safe and fit for the future e.g. dealing with trees affected by ash die back?

Two further questions were asked on what level of increase to Redditch Borough Council's proportion of Council Tax do you support?

- 61.7% agreed or strongly agreed with a 1.99% increase.
- This dropped to 37.8% at 2.99%.

There were 2 free text questions:

- Please let us know your suggestions for investing in the borough to increase prosperity and enhance appeal for residents and businesses alike?
 - There were 181 responses to this question.
 - These responses are being analysed and split then into themes.
- Please let us know any other comments on the budget or ideas for reducing costs or increasing income to ensure Council services remain sustainable?
 - There were 131 responses to this questions.
 - These responses are being analysed and split then into theme

Appendix C outlined the consultation spreadsheet and set out the overall summary and a breakdown by question.

The Leader commended the work and those involved in this report and said it was encouraging to see the engagement from the Community Panel.

The Portfolio Holder also commended the work carried out and the number of responses. It was noted that the results were slightly skewed to the older generation but was a good mandate for what the Council was doing.

The Leader was also disappointed in the response from the younger age groups noting no one less than 19 had completed the survey. It was thought it might be worth asking Communications about visiting schools.

It was noted that there had been a meeting regarding a youth consultation plan and asked for further feedback from the free text questions, it was agreed more information in respect of this would be sent to the Executive Committee.

Members proposed an amendment to the recommendation in respect of Dial-a-Ride. The amendment proposed was that the level of fees for Dial-a-Ride be retained for a further year in order to support vulnerable members of the Borough who utilised the service. The amendment was proposed by the Leader and seconded by Councillor I. Woodhall.

On being put to the vote the amendment was carried. Therefore, it was

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 Members endorse the inputs into the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan as at the middle of October, and the associated risks and opportunities.**
- 2 An initial Tranche of savings proposals and pressures, as set out in Section 3.03 to 3.19, including the fees and charges increases, apart from the dial-a-ride amendment, after consideration of feedback from the consultation exercise which closed on the 2nd January, be approved at Council.**
- 3 The use of £300k of Economic Development Reserve for Feasibility studies at Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow be approved.**

67. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Leader noted that the recommendation in respect of the IRP report had been taken board and thanked the Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for all of their hard work in scrutinising the report at its meeting on 13th January 2025.

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

There were no referrals from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or any of the Executive Advisory Panels on this occasion.

- 69. TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE HEAD OF LEGAL, DEMOCRATIC AND PROCUREMENT SERVICES PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEETING AND WHICH THE CHAIR, BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, CONSIDERS TO BE OF SO URGENT A NATURE THAT IT CANNOT WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING**

There was no urgent business on this occasion.

- 70. HRA RENT SETTING 2025/26**

The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer presented the report on Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Rent Setting 2025/26.

Members were informed that it was a statutory requirement to set HRA rent and ensure that tenants were notified in a timely manner. At least 28 calendar days' notice was required for tenants.

The report set out the rent for 5,539 properties, of which 5,443 were charged social rent and 96 affordable rents.

The existing HRA model had assumed a rent increase of 3% but this had been revised down to 2.7% which was linked to the Government formula of September 2024 CPI plus 1%. The average rent charged would be £106.16 for Social and £165.35 for affordable respectively.

Historically, service charges to tenants and leaseholders were approved as part of the annual fees and charges report. This would now change, and they would be considered alongside the annual rent setting report.

To support this, this Service Charge Policy was drafted. It set out the Council's approach to the charging of and consultation with tenants and leaseholders and in line with statutory and regulatory requirements. This was set out in Appendix 1.

Appendix 2 set out service charges for core cleaning and health and safety checks for the 272 block which involves circa 1,900

tenants. It was noted that a charge of £6.40 would be made. It also set out a service charge of £0.20 for temporary accommodation furniture/appliances and £0.16 for concessionary TV licences.

The Leader thanked officers for their work on this and also to put on record the positive meeting that had taken place previously.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing thanked officers. It was also proposed that an additional recommendation be added as follows:

Delegated authority be granted to the Deputy Chief Executive and Assistant Director Community & Housing following consultation with the Housing Portfolio Holder, to establish a Hardship Fund of £50,000 per annum to support homelessness prevention and this to be met from the HRA budget 2025/26 onwards.

Although the proposed recommendation would be new change it was hoped that it would help improve services in the future. On being put to the vote the additional recommendation was carried.

Members agreed that the report provided a better deal for residents and a more efficient service.

RECOMMENDED that

- a) The actual average rent increase for 2025/26 be set at 2.7%**
- b) Garage rent be increased by 2.7%**
- c) The Service Charge Policy at Appendix 1 be approved**
- d) The Service Charges set out in Appendix 2 be approved**
- e) Delegated authority be granted to the Deputy Chief Executive and Assistant Director Community & Housing following consultation with the Housing Portfolio Holder, to establish a Hardship Fund of £50,000 per annum to support homelessness prevention and this to be met from the HRA budget 2025/26 onwards.**

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 14th January, 2025

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.30 pm