

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Juma Begum, Joanna Kane, Joe Baker, Juliet Barker Smith, William Boyd, Brandon Clayton, Claire Davies, Matthew Dormer, James Fardoe, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Wanda King, Sachin Mathur, Gemma Monaco, David Munro, Rita Rogers, Gary Slim, Jen Snape, Jane Spilsbury, Monica Stringfellow, Craig Warhurst and Ian Woodall

Officers:

Peter Carpenter, Claire Felton and Sue Hanley

Democratic Services Officers:

Jess Bayley-Hill

65. WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all those present to the meeting.

66. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Andrew Fry, Chris Holz, Sid Khan and Alan Mason.

67. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were advised that all Councillors had been granted a general dispensation earlier in the year by the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee to take part in the debate and vote on matters relating to the budget and Council Tax.

There were no declarations of interest.

68. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of Council held on Monday 27th January 2025 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Mayor.

Chair

69. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following announcements were made during the meeting:

a) The Mayor's Announcements

A written record of some of the key civic engagements that had been attended by the Mayor in January and February 2025 was tabled at the meeting for Members' consideration (Appendix A).

b) The Leader's Announcements

The Leader advised that he had attended and chaired a recent meeting of the Worcestershire Leaders' Board, which had also been attended by the Chief Executive. The main subject of discussion at this meeting had been devolution and Local Government Reorganisation. During this meeting, the Leader had conveyed the view that his preferred option for devolution locally would be to have a North Worcestershire Unitary Authority serving the Borough of Redditch. However, it was recognised that at this stage Members should remain open to considering two distinct options; one unitary authority for the whole county as one option and two unitary authorities, for the north and south of the county, as an alternative option. This approach had been supported by five of the seven Leaders who had been in attendance at the meeting.

A report would be prepared on the subject of devolution for consideration at the extraordinary Council meeting, due to take place on 17th March 2025. The Leader expressed the view that the Council needed to assure residents that no option would be adopted without first being subject to a thorough review. Members were advised that the Leader would undertake to work with the leader of the opposition to consider what would best work for the people of Redditch.

During consideration of this item, the Leader highlighted that this was due to be the last ordinary Council meeting that would be attended by the current Chief Executive and the current Deputy Chief Executive. As such, the Leader commented that he wished to use the opportunity to place on record his thanks to both officers for their hard work and support. The leader of the opposition and Councillor Davies were also invited to contribute their comments as part of this process.

In paying tribute to the Deputy Chief Executive, Members commented that he was an officer who worked with sincerity, integrity and, at appropriate times, with humour. When he had

first commenced employment with the Council, there had been a number of challenges which he had worked hard, alongside the Financial Services team, to address. Members recognised that the Deputy Chief Executive had worked extremely hard, often working late hours and at weekends, to ensure that the Council's financial situation was managed efficiently, and in accordance with Members' decisions.

Members subsequently paid tribute to the Chief Executive and in doing so recognised that she had worked for many years for Redditch Borough Council, having been promoted through a number of positions in her career up to a senior level. Over the last 15 years, the Chief Executive had served initially as Deputy Chief Executive for Redditch Borough and Bromsgrove District Councils, managing shared services across the two authorities, before stepping up to the position of joint Chief Executive following the retirement of the previous Chief Executive. Throughout her career, Members expressed the view that the Chief Executive had placed the community at the heart of everything that she did and had always worked hard to identify constructive solutions to any issues raised by Members.

Members concluded their remarks by extending their best wishes for the future to both the Chief Executive and the Deputy Chief Executive.

c) The Chief Executive's Announcements

The Chief Executive thanked Members for their comments and confirmed that she had no announcements to make on this occasion.

70. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Members considered recommendations arising from two meetings of the Executive Committee, held on 4th February and 24th February 2025. As the latter meeting had taken place directly before Council, there were no minutes from that meeting available for consideration at the Council meeting but Members did debate and determine the recommendations.

Pay Policy Statement 2025/26

The Pay Policy Statement 2025/26 was considered by Members. In discussing the report, Members noted that there was a legal requirement for the Pay Policy Statement, which detailed the pay for all staff employed by the authority, to be published on an annual basis by the end of March each year.

During consideration of this report, questions were raised about the extent to which the Council had access to information about the gender pay gap at the authority. Members were advised that the Council did have access to this data and this would be addressed in a report that was due to be considered by Members later in the year.

Reference was also made to the pay scales that applied to posts at grades 1 – 11, with Members noting that the top scale point on one grade was often the same as the bottom scale of the grade above. In this context, Members questioned whether staff promoted up one grade might be expected to take on additional responsibilities in a new role whilst initially not receiving any further pay in recognition for this work. In responding, Officers advised that an assumption could not be made that an officer would have always reached the top scale of their previous grade before they were promoted. However, there was flexibility available to managers to move staff onto a higher scale in a new grade in cases where this was felt to be appropriate.

Medium Term Financial Plan 2025/26 to 2027/28 Tranche 2 Report

The Mayor opened this item by explaining that recommendations had been proposed on the subject of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2025/26 to 2027/28 at both the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 4th February and at the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 24th February 2025. To ensure clarity in the decision-making process on the budget, the Mayor proposed that both sets of recommendations should be considered at the same time at the meeting. Members were also asked to note that no alternative budgets had been received in advance of the meeting for consideration and therefore would not be considered at the meeting.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance subsequently presented the MTFP 2025/26 to 2027/28 Tranche 2 report for Members' consideration. Members were reminded that the budget had been considered in two tranches in a similar manner to 2024/25. The second tranche had been amended to take into account the Local Government Financial Settlement for the Council, which had been confirmed on 3rd February 2025. In advance of the settlement being announced, the local government sector had been advised that core spending power would be increasing for Councils by 6 per cent. However, Redditch Borough Council, like many District Councils, had received a 0 per cent increase. The Government had also assumed in the settlement that the Council would increase Council Tax by 2.99 per cent and if this did not occur, there would be an additional pressure in the budget.

The Local Government Financial Settlement provided in 2025/26 had been a one-year settlement only. In 2026/27, the government had indicated that there would be a move to a three-year funding settlement for local government. However, there remained uncertainty over the funding formula that would be used by that point. The Government was due to consult on proposed changes to funding arrangements and the Council would need to contribute to this consultation process.

The MTFP 2025/26 to 2027/28 recorded a deficit position over the three years of the budget. The conclusion had been reached that it would not be appropriate to cut services at this stage in order to address the deficit because there was the potential that through devolution, those services would need to be reintroduced, potentially at a greater cost. In this context, the deficit would need to be funded from reserves in order to achieve a balanced position.

In terms of debts, the Council only had debts recorded in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for long-term borrowing and there were no debts accrued in the general fund. As such, the Council was considered to be in a stronger financial position than many neighbouring authorities.

The impending Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation meant that Redditch Borough Council would no longer exist in a few years' time. In preparation for the move to unitary authority status, it was recognised that Members would wish to work hard on legacy schemes that would benefit residents of the Borough of Redditch in the future. All schemes would need to meet strict criteria to ensure sustainability and the Council would not be letting reserves fall below £5 million, which was twice the minimum level recommended by the Government.

The MTFP contained a statement from the Section 151 Officer. This had recorded that the budget proposals were considered to be robust, although the deficit position in the budget had been highlighted as had other risks to the Council's finances. Action that could be taken to mitigate these risks had been addressed in the report, which would include maximising opportunities to apply for grant funding.

In concluding the presentation of the report, the Portfolio Holder for Finance read out and proposed the 10 recommendations on the budget that had been recommended at the Executive Committee meeting held on 4th February 2025 alongside the recommendation on the budget that had been proposed at the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 24th February 2025.

Following the presentation of the report, Councillor Matthew Dormer advised that, although his group had not chosen to submit an alternative budget, they were minded to oppose some of the recommendations detailed in the budget papers. This included opposition to proposals in respect of the funding of the Shopmobility Service and opposition to the proposed Ward Member budgets, which he suggested would have been more appropriate for an application process.

Members were also asked to note that Council Tax was higher in the Borough of Redditch than in other parts of Worcestershire and the suggestion was made that a freeze would need to be applied to Council Tax at some point, prior to the introduction of a unitary authority, in order to regularise payments across the new authority area. With this in mind, a request was made to amend paragraph 3.20 of the report to incorporate the following statement:

“That a potential freeze of Council Tax is seen as a high priority and a business case is produced to enable this to happen.”

In response, concerns were raised about amending the report to incorporate this wording. Members noted that there was a lot of uncertainty, on the date of the meeting, with respect to future funding for local government as well as the structure of local government in Worcestershire. In this context, it was suggested that it would not be prudent for the Council to commit to a business case that focused on freezing Council Tax, as this might not be sustainable moving forward.

Reference was made to a meeting of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group (BSWG) at which the MTFP 2025/26 to 2027/28 Tranche 2 report had been pre-scrutinised. Members noted that, based on discussions at the meeting, recommendations had been made on the subject of the report which had been considered and rejected at the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 24th February 2025.

Concerns were raised that an increase to Council Tax of 2.99 per cent at a time when fees and charges were also due to increase generally by 4 per cent would place an increased burden on Redditch residents.

At the end of the debate in respect of the MTFP 2025/26 to 2027/28, it was agreed that separate votes should be taken in respect of the recommendations from the Executive Committee. In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 all of these votes were undertaken as formal recorded votes.

The vote in respect of recommendations 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10 and the recommendation from the Executive Committee meeting held on 24th February 2025 on the MTFP 2025/26 to 2027/28 was recorded as follows:

Members voting FOR the recommendations:

Councillors Joe Baker, Juliet Barker Smith, Juma Begum, William Boyd, Brandon Clayton, Claire Davies, Matthew Dormer, Bill Hartnett, James Fardoe, Sharon Harvey, Joanna Kane, Wanda King, Sachin Mathur, Gemma Monaco, David Munro, Rita Rogers, Gary Slim, Jen Snape, Jane Spilsbury, Monica Stringfellow, Craig Warhurst and Ian Woodall (22).

Members voting AGAINST the recommendations

No councillors (0).

Members ABSTAINING in the vote

No councillors (0)

Therefore, on being put to the vote, recommendations 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10 and the recommendation from the Executive Committee meeting held on 24th February 2025 on the MTFP 2025/26 to 2027/28 Tranche 2 report were carried.

The vote in respect of recommendations 3 and 8 on the MTFP 2025/26 to 2027/28 was subject to a separate named vote and the votes were recorded as follows:

Members voting FOR the recommendations

Councillors Joe Baker, Juliet Barker Smith, Juma Begum, William Boyd, Claire Davies, James Fardoe, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Joanna Kane, Wanda King, Sachin Mathur, David Munro, Rita Rogers, Gary Slim, Jen Snape, Jane Spilsbury, Monica Stringfellow, and Ian Woodall (18).

Members voting AGAINST the recommendations

Councillors Brandon Clayton, Matthew Dormer, Gemma Monaco and Craig Warhurst (4).

Members ABSTAINING in the vote

No councillors (0).

Therefore, on being put to the vote, recommendations 3 and 8 in the MTFP 2025/26 to 2027/28 Tranche 2 report were carried.

Local Development Scheme

The Leader presented the Local Development Scheme, which detailed a timetable for the development of a new Local Plan for the Borough of Redditch.

During consideration of this item, questions were raised about the extent to which the proposed delegation to the Assistant Director for Planning and Leisure Services, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration and Governance, would remove Members' influence over the Local Plan process.

Assurances were provided to Members that this delegation applied only to the timetable and Members would continue to be involved in considering and approving the various elements of the Local Plan. In order to contribute to the Local Plan process, all Members were urged to attend meetings of the Planning Advisory Panel (PAP) at which the Local Plan would be discussed.

Council Tax Resolutions 2025/26

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented the Council Tax Resolutions 2025/26 for Council's consideration and in doing so he proposed and read out each of the recommendations in turn.

In considering the report, Members thanked the Financial Services team for their hard work in preparing the document and reviewing the figures.

During consideration of this item, a typographical error was identified in recommendation 2(a) in the report. Members noted that this recommendation referred to a figure of "£50,366,2909.22" which should in fact have been recorded as "£50,366,290.22" and it was proposed that this recommendation should be amended accordingly.

Reference was made to the implications arising from the report in respect of residents living in Feckenham Parish and questions were raised about whether Feckenham Parish Council would be receiving £42 million under the proposals. Clarification was provided that Feckenham Parish Council would in fact only be receiving £60,000 in the process but this had to be listed alongside the rest of the precepting figures. Officers acknowledged that the way the Council Tax Resolutions were presented could be confusing but Members were advised that this presentation was required as there were strict legal criteria which guided how Council Tax Resolutions should be recorded.

Consideration was given to the increase of 2.99 per cent to Council Tax that had been proposed for 2025/26. It was reiterated that this level of increase was required to Council Tax in order to achieve a sustainable and balanced budget position moving forward.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 Members determined the Council Tax Resolutions 2025/26 by taking a formal named vote and the votes were recorded as follows:

Members voting FOR the Council Tax Resolutions 2025/26

Councillors Joe Baker, Juliet Barker Smith, Juma Begum, William Boyd, Claire Davies, James Fardoe, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Joanna Kane, Wanda King, Sachin Mathur, David Munro, Rita Rogers, Gary Slim, Jen Snape, Jane Spilsbury, Monica Stringfellow, and Ian Woodall (18).

Members voting AGAINST the Council Tax Resolutions 2025/26

Councillors Brandon Clayton, Matthew Dormer, Gemma Monaco and Craig Warhurst (4).

Members ABSTAINING in the vote on the Council Tax Resolutions 2025/26

No Councillors (0).

Therefore, on being put to the vote, the Council Tax Resolutions 2025/26 were carried.

RESOLVED

- 1) that the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 4th February 2025 be approved and all recommendations adopted;**
- 2) that the additional risk, in terms of access to existing former Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership funds from Birmingham City Council in 2025/26 is added to the Risk Log for the Medium Term Financial Plan;**
- 3) that Redditch Borough Council Local Development Scheme 2025 be approved as the Council's programme for plan-making, effective as of 24th February 2025;**

- 4) that delegated authority be granted to the Assistant Director for Planning and Leisure Services, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration and Governance, to approve updates to the Local Development Scheme as required;
- 5) the calculation for the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2025/26 (excluding parish precepts) as £7,345,116.71;
- 6) that the following amounts be calculated for the year 2025/26 in accordance with sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
 - a) £50,366,209.22 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) £42,961,173.51 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) £7,405,116.71 being the amount by which the aggregate of resolution 6(a) above exceeds the aggregate of resolution 6(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) £279.91 being the amount at resolution 6(c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (Resolution (a) of Executive Committee minute item 84 from the minutes of 24th February 2025), 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) £60,000 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Feckenham Parish precept) referred to in section 34(1) of the Act;
 - f) £277.64 being the amount at Resolution 6(d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at resolution 6(e) above by Item T (Resolution (a) of Executive Committee minute item 84 from the minutes of 24th February 2025), 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

dwelling in those parts of its area to which no parish precept relates.

- g) £434.67 being the amount given by adding to the amount at Resolution 6(f) the amount for the special item relating to the parish of Feckenham 6(e), divided by the amount in Resolution (b) of Executive Committee minute item 84 from the minutes of 24th February 2025.
- h) the amounts shown below given by multiplying the amounts at Resolution 6(f) and Resolution 6(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 dwelling listed in band D, calculated 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 paid	Feckenham Parish Council Precept £	Parish of Feckenham Total £	All other parts of the council area £
A	6/9ths	104.69	289.78	185.09
B	7/9ths	122.13	338.07	215.94
C	8/9ths	139.58	386.37	246.79
D	1	157.03	434.67	277.64
E	11/9ths	191.93	531.27	339.34
F	13/9ths	226.82	627.86	401.04
G	15/9ths	261.72	724.45	462.73
H	18/9ths	314.06	869.34	555.28

- 7) It is to be noted that for the year 2025/26, 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 Act 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	1,077.14	1,256.66	1,436.19	1,615.71	1,974.76	2,333.80	2,692.85	3,231.42
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia	194.33	226.72	259.11	291.50	356.28	421.06	485.83	583.00
Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority	68.15	79.50	90.86	102.22	124.94	147.65	170.37	204.44

- 8) that having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at Resolution 6(h) and Resolution 7, 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 2025/26 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings.

Valuation Band	Proportion of band D paid	Parish of Feckenham Total £	All other parts £
A	6/9ths	1,629.40	1,524.71
B	7/9ths	1,900.95	1,778.82
C	8/9ths	2,172.53	2,032.95
D	1	2,444.10	2,287.07
E	11/9ths	2,987.25	2,795.32
F	13/9ths	3,530.37	3,303.55
G	15/9ths	4,073.50	3,811.78
H	18/9ths	4,888.20	4,574.14

- 9) the Director of Resources is 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 2025 to March 2026 as detailed below

	Precept (£)	Surplus/Deficit on Collection Fund (£)	Total to Pay (£)
Worcestershire County Council	42,744,416.00	708,645.00	43,453,061.00
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia	7,711,778.25	127,783.69	7,839,561.94
Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority	2,704,281.25	44,768.03	2,749,049.28

- 10) the Director of Resources is 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 £7,405,116.71 being the Council's own demand on the collection fund (£7,345,116.71) and parish precepts (£60,000) and the distribution of the surplus/deficit on the collection fund (£125,184.84);

- 11) that the Director of Resources is authorised to make payments from the general fund to Feckenham Parish Council the sums listed above (£60,000) by two equal instalments on 1st April 2025 and 1st October 2025 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.

(During consideration of this item, there was a brief adjournment from 19.50 – 19.56.)

71. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2024 - 2025

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee presented the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2024/25.

Members were advised that it had been an informative and, at times, entertaining year in Overview and Scrutiny. The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee expressed the view that the key to constructive scrutiny was Member participation and it was suggested that the more Members contributed to the process the more they would feel that they were making a difference to their community. He concluded by expressing his hopes that Members had found the Overview and Scrutiny process to be useful and he thanked Members for their hard work.

The Vice Chair of the Committee subsequently addressed Council and in doing so highlighted the hard work of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group, the Fly Tipping Task Group, the Performance Scrutiny Working Group and the Post-16 Education Task Group for Council's consideration. In considering the report, Members were asked to note that Overview and Scrutiny was conducted in a cross-party, apolitical manner and had the potential to make a difference to local communities by bringing forward recommendations based on evidence gathered by Members.

In responding to the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2024/25, the Leader commented that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, together with the various Working Groups and Task Groups, had undertaken a lot of work during the year. Members were asked to note that Overview and Scrutiny had an important role to play in holding the Executive Committee to account and whilst this could be difficult, it was valued by the Executive. It was recognised that Overview and Scrutiny could make a real difference to the communities served by the Council and the recommendations made by Overview and Scrutiny Members were taken seriously when debated at Executive Committee meetings. The Leader concluded by thanking members of both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and of the scrutiny Working Groups and Task Groups for their hard work.

72. URGENT BUSINESS - RECORD OF DECISIONS

The Mayor confirmed that one urgent decision had been taken since the previous meeting of Council on the subject of the Promoting Independent Living Service (PIL). A copy of the urgent decision form had been provided for information and the urgent decision was not subject to debate.

73. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

There was no urgent business for consideration on this occasion.

The Meeting commenced at 7.04 pm
and closed at 8.47 pm