

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Joanna Kane (Mayor), and Councillors Juliet Barker Smith, Juma Begum, William Boyd, Claire Davies, Matthew Dormer, James Fardoe, Andrew Fry, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Chris Holz, Sid Khan, Wanda King, Gemma Monaco, Rita Rogers, Jen Snape, Monica Stringfellow, Craig Warhurst, Ian Woodall and Paul Wren

Officers:

Nicola Cummings, Debra Goodall, John Leach, Simon Parry and Judith Willis

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

34. WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all present to the meeting.

35. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Joe Baker, Brandon Clayton, Sachin Mathur, Alan Mason, David Munro, Gary Slim and Jane Spilsbury.

36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

37. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following announcements were made at the Council meeting:

a) The Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor advised that a list of the civic engagements that she and the Deputy Mayor had attended in July and August 2025 had been tabled for Members' consideration (Appendix 1).

The Mayor thanked the Deputy Mayor for attending two civic engagements on her behalf during this period. Members were also thanked for attending a recent event that had been held at the Boathouse.

b) The Leader's Announcements

The Leader read out the following announcement to Members:

"The Council recognises the grief and suffering of those bereaved or seriously injured through road crashes. We welcome the opportunity to work with RoadPeace to recognise the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims. We applaud the work of this charity in providing information and support services to people bereaved or seriously injured in road crashes, alongside their work to reduce road danger.

This World Day of Remembrance takes place on the third Sunday in November, and this year will fall on 16th November. Rubicon Leisure will work with RoadPeace to place an artificial tree in the grounds of The Boat House prior to the event, where people can write a message on a dove card, either to remember a loved one or show their support for the charity. This will stay in place for 14 days. There will be an act of remembrance at the Boathouse on Friday 14th November. Additionally, The Palace Theatre and the Bandstand and fountain on Church Green will be lit up in purple on the third Saturday of November. This will provide an opportunity to remember road traffic victims, support their families and to promote road safety.

RoadPeace will be sending an invitation to all Councillors for the event on 14th November, and I encourage you to attend.

All Councillors are also welcome to attend their Service of Remembrance which is held in Birmingham on 16th November."

c) The Chief Executive's Announcements

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

38. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 9)

The following Question on Notice was submitted by Councillor Chris Holz in advance of the meeting for the consideration of the Leader:

“Recognising that some cash strapped Councils are selling off allotments, does the Leader agree with me that allotments are valuable community assets?”

The Leader responded by commenting that she was grateful that Redditch was not a cash strapped Council. In addition, the Leader agreed that allotments were valuable community assets and important green spaces. Members were advised that the Council had no plans to sell allotments. Instead, the authority was working through the recommendations of the Leisure Strategy to give communities a stronger role in how allotments were managed in the future. The Council’s approach recognised allotments as cherished green spaces that supported residents’ wellbeing, promoted active lifestyles, and strengthened community connection.

Councillor Holz subsequently asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you for your answer. With a Unitary Authority around the corner and associated uncertainty, will you confirm that all allotments, including non-statutory allotments, will be safe and will you go further to make them all statutory?”

The Leader responded by explaining that the Council did not want to lose any allotments. In terms of the potential to make all the allotments statutory, the Leader explained that she would ask Officers to provide a written update to Councillor Holz after the meeting.

39. MOTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 11)

There were no Motions on Notice for consideration on this occasion.

40. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (DMIC) - Appointment of Contractor for Stage 4 Designs

The Leader advised that the appointment of a contractor to work on stage 4 designs for the Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (DMIC) needed to be funded. The work would be financed using the Town’s Deal funding, as agreed by the Town’s Deal Board, and would not therefore require further funding from the Council. However, the Council was the body, under governance arrangements for Town’s Deal funding, that needed to make this decision.

During consideration of this item, Members noted that display boards had recently been put in place at the site. The information

provided would help to inform the public about the works that would be taking place.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Sharon Harvey and seconded by Councillor Bill Hartnett.

Housing Growth Programme

Members were advised that the Executive Committee had agreed four recommendations on the subject of the Housing Growth Programme at a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 8th July 2025. One of these proposals, listed in the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 8th July 2025 at Minute Item No. 18 as recommendation 4, had subsequently been approved through the urgent decision process. This decision had had to be taken urgently in order to enable the Council to have authority to access the necessary budget to purchase properties that had become available but which had needed to be sold by a developer prior to the date of the Council meeting. The other three recommendations, listed as recommendations 5 to 7, were therefore the focus of the debate at the Council meeting.

The positive impact that the purchase of new properties under the Housing Growth Scheme could have was discussed by Members. It was noted that by the date of the Executive Committee meeting held in July 2025, there had been over 2,000 households on the housing waiting list in the Borough. The properties added to the Council's housing portfolio through the Housing Growth Programme would help to increase the number of social housing and affordable units that could be offered to local residents.

Reference was made to the proposed amendments to the Rent Setting Policy and concerns were raised that affordable housing units, whereby the rent was set at 80 per cent of market value, could be difficult for some residents to afford. However, clarification was provided that wherever possible, the Council would aim to rent properties acquired under the Housing Growth Scheme at social housing levels. Higher rent levels would only apply in cases where this was considered to not be viable.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Bill Hartnett and seconded by Councillor Jen Snape.

Treasury Management Outturn Report 2024/25

The content of the Treasury Management Outturn Report 2024/25 was considered by Council. Members were informed that the Council was in a reasonably strong position financially, although the authority was subject to the same macro-economic pressures that

were impacting on all Councils. The Council had robust prudential indicators in place and had started the 2025/26 financial year with a budget surplus.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Ian Woodall and seconded by Councillor Rita Rogers.

Voluntary Sector Grants Scheme 2026/27 to 2029/30

A report detailing the proposed Voluntary Sector Grants Scheme for 2026/27 to 2029/30 was considered by Council. As part of the scheme, there would be £175,000 funding available to support Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations each year, including £75,000 funding for a Financial Advice service.

Reference was made to the detailed scrutiny of the report that had occurred at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 1st September 2025. During this meeting, concerns had been raised about the extent to which VCS organisations that did not have access to a professional bid writer would receive support with advice on completing applications. It was noted that Officers would need to address this as part of the scheme moving forward.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Juma Begum and seconded by Councillor Monica Stringfellow.

Adoption of Fixed Penalty Charge for Breaches of Community Protection Notices

Members considered a report proposing the introduction of a Fixed Penalty Charge (FPN) for breaches of Community Protection Notices (CPNs).

In presenting this report, the Leader highlighted the following information that officers had provided in respect of the use of FPNs for enforcement purposes. This had been provided following scrutiny of the report at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 1st September 2025 when additional clarification about enforcement arrangements and how it worked without access to FPNs had been requested.

“We serve FPNs for littering and fly tipping already, with charges set in the normal fees and charges setting process. We have served five this financial year; three for fly tipping and two for littering, all of which have been paid. As of today, we have 67 open investigations for Redditch. Where evidence has been identified for a potential offender we are moving toward either FPN or a prosecution.

Alongside the above, we also undertake investigations into untidy land and anti-social behaviour concerning waste related matters, such as persistent dog fouling, littering and side waste. For such issues, where detriment to the local amenity and persistence can be established, the serving of a Community Protection Warning (CPW) may be an appropriate step. For dog fouling, for example, we cannot serve an FPN. If that is not heeded, then a CPN can be served. Failure to comply is a criminal offence. We have not served any CPWs or CPNs in Redditch to date as we have so far managed to bring about compliance with warning letters ahead of any CPN.

However, we are acutely aware of our experience in Bromsgrove and that of colleagues around the county where CPWs and subsequently CPNs have been required. We also have experiences of cases where a CPN has technically been breached but it is a minor breach and it would be better dealt with by serving an FPN rather than by prosecution. Since that time, the Council's Community Safety Manager has advised that it is generally recognised that there is 80 – 90 per cent compliance when a CPW is served and that rises to 95 per cent for CPNs which leaves a small per cent of cases where prosecution or an FPN might be used. Most of these will require prosecution because of the scale and severity. However, where there is partial compliance or mitigating circumstances, liability for breaches to date can be discharged by payment of an FPN where that is appropriate."

In this context, Members were asked to note that FPNs provided an additional tool that could be used by Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) for enforcement purposes but this was not the only tool available and would not need to be used on every occasion.

During consideration of this item, questions were raised about the extent to which WRS had access to sufficient resources for enforcement activities and whether action could be taken to strengthen the powers available to the Officers undertaking enforcement action. Members were advised that staffing was a separate matter to the enforcement tools available. Council was reminded that WRS had only taken over responsibility for undertaking enforcement action relatively recently but already progress was being made.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Sharon Harvey and seconded by Councillor Monica Stringfellow.

Regulator of Social Housing – Inspection Report and Housing Improvement Plan

Council was advised that the report detailed the outcomes of an inspection of the Council's Housing Services that had been carried out in 2025 by the Regulator of Social Housing. The inspection was required because the Council was a social housing provider with a housing stock in excess of 1,000 properties. At the end of the inspection, a report had been issued by the Regulator of Social Housing and the Council had been awarded a C3 grade. Whilst Members expressed disappointment that the Council had received a C3 rating, it was noted that over 50 per cent of local authority social housing providers had received the same rating.

In discussing the outcomes of the inspection, Members highlighted that a key challenge that had been identified in respect of the Council's services had related to data and record keeping. This issue had arisen due to problems with the recording of cases, including when tasks had been completed. Officers were working hard to address this issue and Members praised staff in the Housing Department for their dedication to tenants.

Additional action in respect of governance arrangements for the Housing Department were also highlighted. Members were informed that new housing Boards were in the process of being established and senior officers would be involved in the work of these Boards. In addition, there would be opportunities for tenants to contribute through representation and further arrangements that could be introduced to enable greater tenant participation were being explored.

During consideration of this item, Members noted that the report had been pre-scrutinised at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 1st September 2025. All Members had been invited to attend this meeting of the Committee, as it had been recognised that the subject would be of interest to all Councillors. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee was praised for the robust nature of the debate in respect of this item and Members of the Committee were thanked for their hard work.

Consideration was given to one of the points that had been raised at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, where Members had requested assurances that progress would not slip back following the initial response to the inspection findings. It was highlighted that the Council was performing well on important areas such as gas and fire safety inspections of properties. However, concerns were raised that there had been more limited progress with stock condition surveys in recent years. Members were informed that in many areas, good performance had been reported

and improvements continued to be made. However, the Council was not complacent and it was recognised that further action would be needed over the long-term.

In concluding their discussions in respect of this report, Members highlighted that the proposals detailed in the report were integral to the success of the Council's tenant engagement plans. Action would be taken to involve tenants more constructively in the future, as it was recognised that it was important to ensure that tenants were aware of what was happening and could get involved.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Bill Hartnett and seconded by Councillor Ian Woodall.

Quarter 1 2025/26 Finance and Performance Monitoring Report

The Finance and Performance Monitoring Report for the first quarter of 2025/26 was considered by Members.

Council was advised that a slight overspend for the 2025/26 financial year on departmental budgets was anticipated, although the position could change by the end of the financial year. A more rigorous financial management process compared to previous years was being introduced at the Council together with more transparent financial monitoring arrangements. The reports would be open to scrutiny, at meetings of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Ian Woodall and seconded by Councillor Sharon Harvey.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the Executive Committee meetings held on 8th July and 2nd September 2025 be approved and all recommendations adopted.

41. APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

Members were advised that a vacancy had arisen on the Tardebigge Relief in Need and Sickness Charity since the previous meeting of Council, following Councillor Sachin Mathur's resignation from the body.

A nomination was received to appoint Councillor Juma Begum to the Tardebigge Relief in Need and Sickness Charity. The nomination was proposed by Councillor Sharon Harvey and seconded by Councillor Juliet Barker Smith.

RESOLVED that

Councillor Juma Begum be appointed to serve on the Tardebigge Relief in Need and Sickness Charity until May 2028.

42. URGENT BUSINESS - RECORD OF DECISIONS

The Mayor advised that, as detailed during Minute Item No. 40, there had been one urgent decision since the previous Council meeting on the subject of the Housing Growth Programme.

43. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

There was no urgent business for discussion on this occasion.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 7.56 pm