

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive Committee held at the Council Offices,
Gloucester Road, Tewkesbury on Wednesday, 8 January 2020 commencing at
2:00 pm**

Present:

Chair
Vice Chair

Councillor R A Bird
Councillor J R Mason

and Councillors:

G F Blackwell, M Dean, L A Gerrard, M A Gore, E J MacTiernan, H S Munro (Substitute for C Softley), A S Reece (Substitute for R J E Vines), R J Stanley and M G Sztymiak

also present:

Councillor K J Cromwell

EX.59 ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 59.1 The evacuation procedure, as noted on the Agenda, was taken as read.
- 59.2 The Chair welcomed Councillor Cromwell to the meeting who was in attendance, as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, for Item 7 – Performance Management Report – Quarter Two 2019/20.

EX.60 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

- 60.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Softley and R J E Vines. Councillors H C Munro and A S Reece would be acting as substitutes for the meeting.

EX.61 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 61.1 The Committee's attention was drawn to the Tewkesbury Borough Council Code of Conduct which was adopted by the Council on 26 June 2012 and took effect from 1 July 2012.

61.2 The following declarations were made:

Councillor	Application No./Agenda Item	Nature of Interest (where disclosed)	Declared Action in respect of Disclosure
G F Blackwell	Item 16 – Churchdown and Innsworth Neighbourhood Plan Referendum.	Had not been part of the Neighbourhood Plan work but had been in attendance at the Parish Council meeting when it had considered the Plan. However, the Plan did not affect the Parish Council financially.	Would speak and vote.
M A Gore	Item 12 – Community Grants.	Is one of the Ward Members for the areas of Dumbleton and Wormington and had attended the Parish Council meeting when the grant had been discussed but had not taken part in the discussion.	Would speak and vote.
J R Mason	Item 12 – Community Grants.	Is a Member of Winchcombe Town Council which was the grant applicant.	Would not speak and vote and would leave the meeting for the consideration of the Winchcombe Town Council grant update.

61.3 There were no further declarations made on this occasion.

EX.62 MINUTES

62.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2019, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct and signed by the Chair.

EX.63 ITEMS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

63.1 There were no items from members of the public on this occasion.

EX.64 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN

- 64.1 Attention was drawn to the Committee's Forward Plan, circulated at Pages No. 7-10. Members were asked to consider the Plan.
- 64.2 The Chair explained that the Forward Plan currently only ran to the end of the Council year but the Chief Executive had assured him that there would be further items to be added for February and March and for the forthcoming Council year.
- 64.3 Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED: The Committee's Forward Plan be **NOTED**.

EX.65 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT - QUARTER TWO 2019/20

- 65.1 The report of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, circulated at Pages No. 11-62, asked Members to review and, if appropriate, take action on the observations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee following its review of the 2019/20 quarter two performance management information.
- 65.2 Attention was drawn to the observations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, attached at Appendix 1 to the report; the Council Plan Performance Tracker, attached to the report at Appendix 2; and the financial performance information circulated at Appendices 3-5.
- 65.3 Members had been provided with a summary of the key areas discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which included: concerns regarding the target date being amended for a fourth time in respect of tourism provision in the Borough - the Head of Development Services had provided an update and reminded Members that the action reflected more than just the Tewkesbury Tourist Information Centre but involved a review of the broader service which was currently underway, the outcome of which should be reported back to Members in March 2020; queries about the supply of land to accommodate the five-year requirement, to which the Head of Development Services had confirmed that land supply was calculated on an annual basis and therefore remained the same each quarter which was the reason there was not a Key Performance Indicator for the action –the High Court Judge had decided not to rule on the position deeming it a matter for each decision-maker hence the Council would continue to defend its position; a question relating to the number of affordable homes delivered in quarter two, and why not as many had been delivered compared to quarter one, to which the Head of Community Services had confirmed the Council had little control over this as it was dependent on the timescales on sites; questions in respect of the progress of the programme of working with landlords and the Head of Community Services had confirmed that, whilst there had been delays, the programme was no further behind any of the other Gloucestershire authorities and, there had been development within the third quarter, with the scheme about to be adopted along with the launch event for landlords and agents which was being organised by the new member of the team; Members expressing the view that it was difficult to establish whether the Key Performance Indicators surrounding housing applications and homelessness were performing well or not and the Head of Community Services had confirmed that, following the legislative change, the information could not be compared to last year's figures so a review of the Indicators would have to be carried out for 2020/21 in the meantime, the narrative for the section would be amended to include more informative information which clearly showed how the Indicators were performing; a Member sought further details as to the issues surrounding delays to the Council Tax paperless billing project and, in response, the Head of Corporate Services had explained that there had been issues around the performance of the supplier which had required One

Legal to look at the contract and a new in-house solution was being looked at which could potentially be achieved by February 2020; and lastly, concerns as to why the performance had slipped for both formal complaints and Freedom of Information requests, which had led to a discussion which highlighted an opportunity for an extension of time with the complainant if Officers felt they needed it – the Head of Development Services undertook to remind Planning Officers to negotiate a new deadline if the complaint was complex and required legal advice before a response could be sent. In relation to Freedom of Information requests, the Head of Community Services had explained the volume of work put into answering requests which was incredibly time consuming and that Management Team was now considering what information could be made available on the website to reduce the resources currently being used on answering Freedom of Information requests.

- 65.4 The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee indicated that the main topic of discussion had been the Garden Town project with Members voicing concerns that the overall masterplan for the Junction 9 area seemed to have been subsumed into the Garden Town project and that the wider Membership had not been properly appraised of the work undertaken to date. The Head of Development Services had agreed that a Member seminar would be arranged in the New Year to address those concerns. In addition, the Chief Executive confirmed that the Tewkesbury Garden Town Member Reference Panel had been of the same view at its last meeting and the Tewksbury Garden Town Programme Director was putting together a work programme for the Panel which would include considering the internal and external communications in respect of workstreams and activities within the project; this would be taken forward in addition to the Member seminar to ensure everyone involved was kept properly informed. The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also questioned whether there would be improved information provision in respect of the Cyber Central Garden Community. In response, the Head of Corporate Services advised that there would be an action on this within the Council Plan therefore progress would be monitored by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee through the performance tracker. In addition, the Chief Executive confirmed that Members had received an initial report to Council some months ago on the governance of that project and Officers were also looking at how to communicate information effectively to Members going forward. To date, there had been a lot of technical work on this project and Members had received a taste of that at the seminar the previous evening.

- 65.5 Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's comments on the Performance Management Report for Quarter Two of 2019/20 be **NOTED**.

EX.66 COUNCIL PLAN 2020-2024

- 66.1 The report of the Head of Corporate Services, circulated at Pages No. 63-84, attached a new Council Plan for 2020-2024 which Members were asked to consider and recommend to Council for adoption.
- 66.2 Members were advised that the Council Plan was the key strategic document which established the overarching vision for the Borough and set out, in broad terms, the priorities, objectives and actions that the Council would focus on to work towards its vision. The current plan had been approved in 2016 and was due to end this year therefore a new Plan was required. A Member Workshop had been held on 5 November 2019 which had discussed the shape of the new priorities and

what the supporting objectives may look like. The workshop had been very well attended with Members positively engaged. They had been generally happy to retain the current four priorities and to add two new priority areas of 'Garden Communities' and 'Sustainable Environment' – it was noted that the word 'sustainable' had been used a lot at the workshop but was limited within the Council Plan as it was felt that overuse may dilute its meaning. The six priority areas had been subject to a two-week public consultation period during which time 345 responses had been received and those were summarised at Appendix 2 to the report – the comments received had not affected the substance of the Plan.

66.3 Following the Member workshop, the Heads of Service and Operational Managers had discussed the draft Council Plan and much of it had been populated in consultation with those Officers. The document had then been considered by Group Leaders and the Green Party Member with some comments received about the photographs within the Plan being too focused on manufacturing rather than on the environment of the Borough. In addition, comments had been made about the use of the phrase 'low Council Tax' with some Members having the view that it should refer to a 'fair Council Tax'. Management Team had agreed that whilst a low Council tax could be evidenced, a fair Council tax was a very subjective phrase as what was fair to some would not be seen that way by others.

66.4 The Chair had been impressed with the work undertaken on the Plan and he hoped the comment made about the photographs within the Plan could be addressed as this appeared to be a valid point. Other Members agreed and suggested some of the Borough's tourist attractions, such as Tewkesbury Abbey, Sudeley Castle, Cleeve Hill Golf Club and the Cheese Roll, could be included. The Head of Corporate Services undertook to address this. In terms of the low/fair Council Tax remarks, some Members felt the phrase should be changed and that the use of the word 'fair' could be quantified with some thought. Other Members were of the view that 'fair' was too subjective and dependent on the social spectrum which could lead to divides in the community. One Member questioned whether the phrase needed to be included at all and, in response, the Chair expressed the view that the Council Plan set out the direction of the Council for the next four years and its intention with the Council Tax was both an important reference point for its performance and also fundamental in its financial planning.

66.5 One Member felt the Council Plan did not go far enough in terms of the climate change emergency or the unresolved issues in respect of potential flooding following the development of the Garden Town. In response, the Chair indicated that this was the reason for their inclusion as priorities in the Plan as it meant the Council was devoting resources to getting it right. In response to a query about the regeneration schemes which were noted within the Plan, and were quite Tewkesbury specific, the Head of Corporate Services reminded Members that the Plan was a 'live' document which would be refreshed annually, as such, new actions would be included as others were delivered. In terms of residents understanding the gap between development and infrastructure, the Chief Executive advised that there was a reference to infrastructure within the body of the Council Plan; it was difficult to go into too much detail within the Plan whilst still making it easy to read and understand.

66.6 Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED: That it be **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** that the Council Plan 2020-2024 be **ADOPTED** subject to some of the more business-related photographs being replaced by photographs of tourism/environment related areas.

EX.67 COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

- 67.1 The report of the Head of Corporate Services, circulated at Pages No. 85-115, attached a Communications Strategy and Media Protocol which Members were asked to approve following endorsement from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 67.2 The Committee was advised that communications had a vital role to play in helping Tewkesbury Borough Council to deliver its vision, priorities and objectives to local people. The Communications Strategy and action plan was short and simple and looked at how the Council could grow its communications from now to its aims in the future. The current strategy had been approved in 2017 and it was necessary to introduce a new strategy that developed and improved communications as well as ensuring it was in line with current best practice. Communication was at the heart of everything the Council did at all levels and helped strengthen its links with the public, residents, stakeholders, Councillors and staff. The Communications Strategy would run until 2024 and would ensure the Council embraced modern digital communications such as social media, website and email communications, whilst recognising the need to continue to include the more traditional methods of face-to-face and telephone. The Media Protocol outlined the Council's approach to responding to media enquiries, developing press releases and identifying spokespeople. Generally, it remained much the same as in previous years with the addition of a section to clarify who should be quoted in a press release about motions to Council.
- 67.3 A Member questioned whether the new Strategy would be circulated to all Members and, upon being advised that it would, it was

RESOLVED: That the Communications Strategy and Media Protocol be **APPROVED**.

EX.68 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

- 68.1 The report of the Head of Finance and Asset Management, circulated at Pages No. 116-138, attached the Medium Term Financial Strategy which Members were asked to recommend to Council for adoption.
- 68.2 Members were advised that the Strategy provided the financial plan for the Council for the period 2020/21-2024/25 and set out the Council's estimates of its commitment expenditure, identified the spending pressures faced and the budget savings needed to achieve the recommended Council Tax levels for each of the three years of the plan. It was regrettable that the estimates had been completed on limited information from the government about future funding which made it exceptionally difficult for any meaningful financial planning for future years.
- 68.3 Attention was drawn to the key sections of the strategy. Section four set out the local government finance settlement – this was a one year settlement so the following four years was based on the most likely projection. There was no conclusion as yet to the fair funding review so, again, there was no allowance for that in the figures. Overall, for the next five years a reasonably flat provision was expected. Section five referred to New Homes Bonus funding – this was likely to be withdrawn over the next few years – although there had been no confirmation of this intention as yet – 'table 3' showed the most likely way the funding would be withdrawn. Section six set out information about retained business rates – the move to 75% exemption for business rates had been delayed for a further year with a new implementation date of April 2021; whilst many questions remained unanswered it looked likely that a re-set, partial or full, of the current system would take place in 2021 and this assumption had been built into the forecast of potential

business rate retention over the Medium Term Financial Strategy period. Section seven related to growth pressures – the internal growth was easier to understand and included items such as a 2% pay award, an allowance for contract growth, e.g. Ubico, and other depot related services e.g. recycling credits. There was also a general acknowledgement that growth would be needed across all service areas as a result of new Council priorities such as tackling climate change; general growth of the Borough resulting in increasing demand on all services such as the Revenues section; and tackling emerging risks such as cyber security. Section 10 set out the Medium Term Financial Projection – which included the impact of all known capital and revenue commitments between 2020/21 and 2024/25 and showed an overall cumulative deficit of £5,059,000 by 2024/25. Section 11 referred to Council Tax – table 9 highlighted the potential Council Tax strategy and what the percentage increases would look like. Section 12 showed the deficit reduction programme – some of the items were already progressing and some needed to be progressed; treasury management generated £230,000 which meant the Council did not have to rely on bank deposits; pension reductions showed £450,000 savings; waste and recycling showed £400,000 savings which was a high level indication of what could happen and this would be brought forward for discussion in due course; business rates retention growth showed £960,000 savings with significant potential growth at Junction 9; and, as the government had indicated it would replace New Homes Bonus funding with an incentive scheme, a figure had been included worth 25% of the current scheme. The direction of travel was for a £5million deficit.

68.4 Referring to the growth pressures, and the fact that the Council was seeing an increased level of contamination within the recycling it collected which could cost around £100,000, a Member asked what was being done to encourage people to put the correct items in the bins. In response, the Lead Member advised that the Council had seen a gradual increase in what the contractor needed and it was felt that a new campaign of re-education was required to ensure people knew what they were doing and what could happen when items were placed in the wrong bins. Crews now opened the lids of bins before they collected them and, if there was something in it which should not be, the bin was not emptied. In response a Member expressed the view that this was not fixing the problem and questioned whether people could be fined. She was advised that this would not be possible so the only thing the Council could do was to refuse to empty the bin. The Chief Executive indicated that contamination cost the Council a lot and could ultimately result in Council Tax increases; that point could be made to the public which may help. Another Member questioned whether information could be put on the bins to explain why they had not been collected and was advised that it was. Members were informed that other areas in the County had not received good press about new recycling schemes whereas Tewkesbury Borough's collections were seen as a great example; however, this was largely due to a perception that people could put everything that had a recycling mark in the bin and this was actually not the case which was why there had been issues with contamination; it was true that some re-education was required to address this. A Member suggested schools would be a good place to take a campaign as the children would re-educate their parents.

68.5 Referring to Page No. 126, Paragraph 4.7, a Member noted that the Council was penalised within the fair funding model for its low Council Tax and she questioned whether the authority needed to reflect on that in terms of its stance in the Council Plan to keep a low Council Tax. In response, the Head of Finance and Asset Management explained that the needs-based funding allocated by the government followed a very simplistic formula which took the national Council Tax average and applied it in each area; this resulted in an assumption that the Council could generate more Council Tax than it actually did. In reality, the low Council Tax was historic and the authority had no freedom to increase to the levels that the

government thought they should be due to the Council Tax increase limits set by the government. The only thing the Council could do was to continue lobbying for a change to the calculations; however, there were other authorities that benefited from the way it was set so they campaigned for the calculation to remain as it was. In terms of when some clarity on finances generally would be received from the government, there was currently no timescale available - it was hoped it would be late spring/early summer so there was information available for the next budget-setting process but this was by no means certain.

68.6 Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED: That it be **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** that the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020/21-2024/25 be **ADOPTED**.

EX.69 TREASURY AND CAPITAL MANAGEMENT

69.1 The report of the Head of Finance and Asset Management, circulated at Pages No. 139-172, explained that the Council was required to adopt a range of strategies and policies before the start of the financial year in order to provide clarity on the plans for the financial management of the authority in the forthcoming year. The documents were attached to the report as Appendices A-E and the Committee was asked to recommend to Council that they be adopted.

69.2 The Finance Manager explained that there were five strategies and policies in total that formed the suite of documents which needed to be approved. Two were new requirements introduced in 2019; the Capital Strategy and the Investment Strategy. The Finance Manager briefly explained that the Capital Strategy showed how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contributed to the provision of local public services and the risks involved; the Investment Strategy referred to non-treasury investments such as commercial property investments and set out how the Council invested and the risks; the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement showed how the Council set aside revenue funding for the borrowing undertaken for capital purposes; the Treasury Management Strategy set the framework within which the day-to-day and strategic treasury activities were operated; and the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Policy – the information contained within the report was incorrect but the appendix was correct – set out that the Council had one new intention for the use of flexibility over capital receipts to support transformational projects in 2020/21 which was £40,000 to support service reform feasibility work within the waste collection and recycling service area.

69.3 Members were advised that this was a statutory requirement rather than legislation so the Council could deviate from it as long as it could provide an explanation. In terms of the Investment Strategy, the Council had chosen not to follow the guidance in respect of borrowing in advance of need; the full explanation was set out within the Strategy but, essentially, Tewkesbury Borough Council did borrow in advance of need for its commercial property purchases as, without that income, it would not be able to balance its budget. The Council remained prudent in its treasury and capital activities so was not really the type of authority the government was targeting with these rules.

69.4 Having considered the information provided, it was

RESOLVED: That it be **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** that the following strategies and policies be **ADOPTED**:

- Capital Investment Strategy 2020/21.
- Investment Strategy 2020/21.
- Minimum Revenue Provision Statement 2020/21.
- Treasury Management Strategy 2020/21.
- Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Policy 2020/21.

EX.70 COMMUNITY GRANTS

70.1 The report of the Head of Finance and Asset Management, circulated at Pages No. 173-179, provided an update on the capital grant schemes which remained outstanding since the Community Grants Working Group had been disbanded. Members were asked to consider the information provided and agree the approach for the ongoing management of each grant award.

70.2 The Head of Finance and Asset Management explained that this was a 12-month update from the last report. There were three specific grants to consider: Prior's Park Community Parking Provision; Wormington Village Society – Village Hall; and Winchcombe Town Council – Winchcombe Skate Park. In respect of Prior's Park community parking provision, Tewkesbury Borough Council had identified sites within its ownership and was now at the stage of procuring design and specification services to apply for planning permission early in the New Year. Given that the project was now being progressed by the Council on its own land with no actual grant being made to a separate body, it was now essentially a capital scheme and as such would be re-designated as a capital project rather than as a capital grant – Members were asked to approve this action and the Council's capital programme would then be updated accordingly.

70.3 In terms of the Wormington Village Hall grant, Members were advised that the project had previously been given a 12-month extension by the Executive Committee and the Village Hall Society had been told that, during that time, it was expected that the legal issues would be resolved; all funding would be secured; planning permission would be in place; a contractor would have been appointed; and works would have begun by 1 November 2019. An update from the Society had indicated that no agreement had been reached with Dumbleton Parish Council on the use of the land therefore the scheme had not been progressed. It was for the Committee to decide now whether it wanted to give the project more time; withdraw the funding; or agree a further six-month extension to try to get a solution. During the discussion which ensued, one of the local Members indicated that she had attended the Parish Council where a motion had been tabled asking for the land to be transferred to the Wormington Village Society to enable it to pursue its aim of constructing a Village Hall for the use of residents and Church functions. When transferring the land, Dumbleton Parish Council would be absolved of all liability, legal or financial, and the legal costs would be met by the Society – the proposal had been agreed by the lady who had gifted the land. The Parish Council meeting had rejected the motion in accordance with the Chair's recommendation following legal advice received that the land could not be leased or transferred to any organisation. The local Member expressed the view that, as far as she could see, the two parties – Dumbleton Parish Council and Wormington Village Society – were at deadlock and could see no prospect of a resolution to the issues. She also

felt that Tewkesbury Borough Council's Officers had done all they could, including getting the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council to mediate, as such the best way forward appeared to be to withdraw the grant and reallocate the funding. Another Member agreed that the Council had taken the matter as far as it could and, as the parties were at an impasse that could not be resolved, it would be a waste of Officer resources to offer a further extension. A Member advised that he had some involvement with the project from the start and understood that the land had been a gift from a resident of Wormington for the benefit of the village; the lady would have left the land to Wormington Village Society had it been in existence but the only organisation she could gift it to at the time had been Dumbleton Parish Council. These were two completely separate settlements which were divided by a main road and were a good distance apart. Dumbleton had its own Village Hall but Wormington did not which was why the resident had gifted the land.

- 70.4 In terms of Winchcombe Skate Park, an update had been received that planning permission had been gained and nine of the 13 conditions attached to the permission had now been discharged. The Town Council had appointed a designer to prepare the technical specifications and drawings and a Project Manager had been appointed to take the tendering process forward. The Town Council would be applying for a loan from the Public Works Loan Board of up to £500,000 and, in the meantime, would continue to look for funding opportunities with the help of Active Gloucestershire and other sources in the hope that the full £500,000 would not need to be drawn down. It was hoped that work could start in early spring 2020 with the project completed by summer 2020; unfortunately, the conditions on the planning permission and the preparation of reports had introduced a delay in the project timescales which could not be anticipated. At this stage it was known that there would be an increase in the cost of materials due to the quotes being relatively old so the budget of £192,510 for the skate park would have to be increased slightly; however, the figure would not be known until there was a firm date to start and a purchase order had been made. It was suggested that a 12-month extension would allow the project to get well on the way to completion. In terms of the projected costs, the Head of Finance and Asset Management confirmed that the project had changed considerably since the grant application had first been made which was why funding was required from the Public Works Loan Board; however, the Borough Council could only pay up to £70,000 which was the reason the Town Council needed to find other ways to cover the shortfall.
- 70.5 In response to a query as to whether grants were time-limited, the Chief Executive confirmed that they were; however, community organisations often asked for a grant as part of a larger fund-raising campaign and, as such, sometimes there was a need to extend the time-period to allow for a project to come to fruition. In this case more than one extension had been agreed and Members needed to decide if another extension was suitable. Members felt that it would be worth asking the Deputy Chief Executive to mediate in respect of the Wormington Village Hall project to see if it could be moved forward. Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED:

1. That it be **NOTED** and **APPROVED** that the grant for Prior's Park Community Parking Provision be transferred into Council's capital programme.
2. That a six-month extension be granted to the Wormington Village Society – Village Hall grant - to enable the Deputy Chief Executive to engage with the parties concerned with a view to establishing whether the project would come forward and then, at the end of the six-month period, to prepare a report for consideration by the Executive Committee.

3. That a 12-month extension be granted to Winchcombe Town Council for the Skate Park project to be progressed.

EX.71 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME AND COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS

- 71.1 The report of the Head of Corporate Services, circulated at Pages No. 180-189, provided Members with an update on the annual review of Council Tax discounts and sought approval for their adoption effective from 1 April 2020. Members were asked to consider the information provided and make a recommendation to Council.
- 71.2 The Committee was advised that, in January 2019, Council had approved a local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the 2019/20 financial year. The scheme had remained the same since 2013/14 and it was agreed that it would be reviewed for the 2020/21 financial year due to the impact of Universal Credit. At its meeting on 4 September 2019, the Executive Committee had given approval for consultation to take place on three options for a new scheme: an income banded scheme; a scheme where all working age claimants paid a percentage of Council Tax; or to remain on the default scheme – the response to the consultation was set out on Pages No. 186-189 but, as only 108 responses had been received, this was not indicative of residents of the Borough and Officers were proposing the Council remained on the default scheme for a further year but with a minor adjustment that, because of the difficulties with Universal Credit meaning entitlement had to be reassessed every four weeks, it was not administratively efficient or understandable by residents to reassess Council Tax reduction that often and accordingly it was proposed that a tolerance be introduced whereby any changes of £10 per week or less in income be disregarded.
- 71.3 In terms of Council Tax discounts, it was suggested that they be retained as existing except that unoccupied and substantially unfurnished properties that were currently discounted at 100% for one month and 25% for five months be changed to 25% for the whole six months; and the additional power of increasing the levy charge to 200% for properties that have been unoccupied and unfurnished for over five years be introduced. The Revenues and Benefits Manager explained that the initial discount of 100% in respect of unoccupied and substantially unfurnished properties caused a lot of landlord and tenant disputes which, in turn, took up a lot of officer time which could be freed up to enable them to deal with other value added tasks such as the recovery of Council Tax arrears. In terms of the 200% levy on properties unoccupied and unfurnished for over five years, this would be an additional income to the Council of approximately £4,000 but, moreover, would support the Council's strategy to bring empty properties back into use.
- 71.4 Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED:

That it be **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** that:

1. The default Council Tax Reduction Scheme be **ADOPTED** to be effective from 1 April 2020 with a minor revision to the national working age regulations to allow for a de minimis tolerance for income changes.

2. Authority be delegated to the Head of Finance and Asset Management, in consultation with the Lead Member for Finance and Asset Management, to agree the uprating of the working age regulations incorporated into the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme in line with those announced by the Department for Work and Pensions.
3. The following Council Tax discounts be **ADOPTED** to be effective from 1 April 2020:
 - The discount for unoccupied and substantially unfurnished properties is 25% for a maximum period of six months.
 - The discount for properties which are vacant and require major repair work to render them habitable is 25% for a maximum period of 12 months.
 - The discount for unoccupied furnished properties (second home) is zero.
 - An empty homes premium of an additional 100% is levied on properties that have remained unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than two years.
 - An empty homes premium of an additional 200% is levied on properties that have remained unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than five years.

EX.72 DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS

- 72.1 The report of the Head of Corporate Services, circulated at Pages No. 190-192, explained the increased pressures the Council was seeing on the Discretionary Housing Payments budget and asked the Committee to agree additional funding of £40,000 from expected windfall on business rates retention to supplement the Council's allocation for Discretionary Housing Payments for the 2019/20 financial year.
- 72.2 The Revenues and Benefits Manager explained that the Council had the power to award Discretionary Housing Payments to provide additional financial assistance towards housing costs where claimants were in receipt of housing benefit or Universal Credit where housing costs were included. Annual funding for this was provided by the government and the Council was able to top-up the funding from its own resources by an additional 150%. The rollout of Universal Credit had placed particular pressure on the budget and it was anticipated that expenditure would exceed the government contribution by approximately £41,939. For the Council to continue to support its most vulnerable residents, the budget would need to be 'topped up'. To ensure the awards made were being properly assessed in terms of policy, the Revenues and Benefits Manager indicated that she had asked Internal Audit to check all applications that had been received this year to ensure payments were being made efficiently and effectively.

72.3 During the discussion which ensued, a Member questioned whether other Councils were having similar issues and whether the government was likely to provide additional funding in 2020/21. In response, the Revenues and Benefits Manager drew attention to Paragraph 2.3 of the report which explained that, in the 2019 spending round, the Chancellor had announced additional earmarked funding of £40million for Discretionary Housing Payments to “tackle affordability pressures in the private rented sector in England and Wales”; however, that additional funding would not be received until 2020/21 so would not help with the current year. Across Gloucestershire the patterns were similar with more pressure this year than in previous years. In response to a concern that the recommendation was to use ‘expected’ windfall monies, the Head of Finance and Asset Management explained that it was not known until the end of the year exactly what would happen with business rates which was the reason the wording ‘expected’ was used; however, since the appeal by the NHS had been found in the Council’s favour there was more confidence in the amount of business rates to be received this year. It was unknown how much would be needed for Discretionary Housing Payments in the future but it was expected that the pressures on the budget would continue; the Head of Finance and Asset Management advised that the Council would have to see how much additional funding the government put in and then assess what requests were received for Discretionary Housing Payments in the forthcoming year to understand if a similar report would be required next time.

72.4 Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED: That it be **AGREED** that additional funding of £40,000 be funded from the expected windfall on business rates retention to supplement the Council’s allocation for Discretionary Housing Payments for the 2019/20 financial year.

EX.73 CYBER CENTRAL GARDEN COMMUNITY - WEST CHELTENHAM STRATEGIC MASTERPLAN SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

73.1 The report of the Head of Development Services, circulated at Pages No. 193-289, sought authority to consult on the Cyber Central Garden Community draft Supplementary Planning Document, as set out within the report, and to delegate authority to the Head of Development Services to make editorial changes to the draft document in terms of formatting, presentation and accuracy prior to publication for consultation purposes.

73.2 Members were advised that the draft Supplementary Planning Document had been subject to engagement with key stakeholders and the wider community of West Cheltenham through a series of face to face sessions as well as a technical review by specialist Officers across Cheltenham Borough, Tewkesbury Borough and Gloucester City Councils. The document had been informed by the Joint Core Strategy, the emerging Local Industrial Strategy, the Connecting Cheltenham Transport Strategy, applications for Local Green Space Designations and Hester’s Way Neighbourhood Plan together with technical reports and assessments detailing constraints and opportunities for West Cheltenham. The preparation of a Supplementary Planning Document provided the opportunity to guide, encourage and improve development within the strategic allocation to have a positive impact which was considered to be important.

73.3 Cheltenham Borough Council's Cabinet had approved the document for consultation in late December and, subject to agreement from Tewkesbury Borough Council, the consultation would commence on 13 January for a period of five weeks. Once the consultation was complete, a full report, together with any subsequent changes, would be presented to Council in April; if approved the Supplementary Planning Document would become a material consideration to the determination of future planning applications.

73.4 During the brief discussion which ensued, a Member expressed her surprise that the website for the project was not referred to within the consultation document; in response, the Head of Development Services undertook to ensure the new website (www.cybercentralcheltenham.co.uk) was referenced. A Member indicated that the document was very impressive and the project was really exciting so she hoped it came to fruition. Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED:

1. That the draft Cyber Central Garden Community Draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), as attached to the report at Appendix 1, be **APPROVED** for consultation in accordance with Regulation 13 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 for a period of five weeks.
2. That the consultation arrangements, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report, be **APPROVED**.
3. That authority be delegated to the Head of Development Services to make editorial changes to the draft Supplementary Planning Document in terms of formatting, presentation and accuracy prior to its publication for consultation purposes.

EX.74 CHURCHDOWN AND INNSWORTH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN REFERENDUM

74.1 The report of the Head of Development Services, circulated at Pages No. 290-434, attached the examiner's report and suggested modifications along with the amended version of the Churchdown and Innsworth Neighbourhood Plan. Members were asked to approve the Plan for a community referendum and to delegate authority to the Head of Development Services, in consultation with the Lead Member for Built Environment, to make any necessary minor amendments prior to the referendum.

74.2 Members were advised that the Churchdown and Innsworth Neighbourhood Plan had been through the required process and had now reached the advanced stage whereby it was ready, subject to the modifications recommended by the independent examiner, to proceed to a community referendum. Borough Council Officers had considered the modifications suggested and were satisfied with the examiner's conclusions and the relevant Parish Councils had also accepted those amendments. Therefore, it was recommended that the amended Plan was progressed to a referendum.

74.3 Members noted that there were very few modifications suggested by the examiner which showed what a good Plan had been put forward. Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED:

1. That the Churchdown and Innsworth Neighbourhood Development Plan, modified according to the Examiner's recommended amendments, be **APPROVED** to progress to community referendum ascribed by Regulation 18 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, as amended.
2. That authority be delegated to the Head of Development Services, in consultation with the Lead Member for Built Environment, to make any necessary minor amendments prior to the referendum.

The meeting closed at 4:15 pm