

# TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive Committee held at the Council Offices,  
Gloucester Road, Tewkesbury on Wednesday, 27 November 2019 commencing  
at 2:00 pm**

## **Present:**

Chair  
Vice Chair

Councillor R A Bird  
Councillor J R Mason

## **and Councillors:**

M Dean, M A Gore, E J MacTiernan and M G Sztymiak

### **EX.49 ANNOUNCEMENTS**

49.1 The evacuation procedure, as noted on the Agenda, was taken as read.

### **EX.50 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

50.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G F Blackwell, L A Gerrard, J R Mason, C Softley, R J Stanley and R J E Vines. There were no substitutions for the meeting.

### **EX.51 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

51.1 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.

51.2 There were no declarations of interest made on this occasion.

### **EX.52 MINUTES**

52.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2019, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record.

### **EX.53 ITEMS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

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

**EX.54 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN**

- 54.1 Attention was drawn to the Committee's Forward Plan, circulated at Pages No. 8-12. Members were asked to consider the Plan.
- 54.2 A Member noted that the January Agenda looked very heavy and questioned whether anything could move to a different date. The Chief Executive undertook to take the matter away for consideration, although he was conscious that many of the items would need to be considered at that meeting.
- 54.3 Accordingly, it was

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee's Forward Plan be **NOTED**.

**EX.55 FINANCIAL UPDATE - QUARTER TWO 2019/20**

- 55.1 The report of the Head of Finance and Asset Management, circulated at Pages No. 13-32, highlighted a quarter two deficit of £18,530 on the revenue budget and detailed the expenditure to date against both the capital programme and the approved reserves. Members were asked to consider the financial information provided.
- 55.2 The Head of Finance and Asset Management advised that, overall, the deficit had fallen at the end of quarter two which was good news; however, it was still early in the year. Employee costs showed a surplus of £111,439 which had been generated mainly through staff vacancies across most services. Services had managed vacancies during the period by utilising current staff to cover work in the short term and limiting the use of agency staff where possible. Supplies and services were showing a deficit of £79,197, this was mostly due to expenditure incurred on delivering the European elections. The Council received grant income to cover the cost of the elections therefore an income surplus within Democratic Services matched that expenditure. The Borough election expenditure was also contained within Democratic Services and this was matched through one-off funding from reserves and New Homes Bonus meaning, overall, Democratic Services was in a cost neutral position. In terms of payments to third parties, a deficit of £168,280 was shown - this related to the delivery of the waste and recycling services due to additional resources on grounds maintenance rounds to ensure issues with grass cutting were minimised during the growing season and the additional cost of the depot which had been agreed after the budget was set. Both overspends were being covered through one-off reserve use for the current year. The remaining significant element of the Ubico budget position was the hire of additional vehicles: there was the specific hire cost of an additional vehicle whilst the procurement for a new narrow access vehicle continued. There had also been a couple of accidents which had meant additional hire and repair costs whilst those vehicles were out of operation. In terms of transfer payments, there was a deficit of £130,000 which related to housing benefit claimant payments and recovery of expenditure from the government. The Council was entitled to 100% of the debt if it could be reclaimed from the claimant and therefore it was possible, in the long-term, to eradicate the housing benefit claim; however, recovering significant overpayments could take a long time and was extremely difficult. The situation would continue to be monitored through the rest of the year with the housing benefit team targeting key individuals to recover debt as quickly as possible. In terms of income, there was a surplus currently of £200,970 which was due to £148,000 of grant funding for the European elections; £55,000 of grant funding for the revenues and benefits service; £37,000 gain from the garden waste service; and £12,000 gain on car parking. The positive position was offset by a deficit on

planning income at the half year point, the expectation was that by the year-end several large individual planning applications would be received to ensure the income target was met. In addition, there was a deficit on the amount of recycling credits received due to the actual level of recyclate collected being less than was included in the budget - the budget had not included an allowance for non-recyclable material in the system therefore there had been an overestimation of the recycling credits due.

- 55.3 In terms of the corporate codes which included other sources of financing that were needed to balance the budget, there was a significant budget deficit being shown on investment properties due to the Council not having secured another commercial opportunity as expected at the end of the previous year; this had meant the income expected to have been received in rent had not been achieved. That loss had been mitigated by treasury management costs having been reduced through lower borrowing and no minimum revenue provision being made meaning a cost neutral position on the budget. Business rates was showing a surplus at the half year stage which was helping to reduce the overall deficit position for the Council. The Gloucestershire-wide business rates pool was going well and there was a potential windfall to Tewkesbury Borough Council of £250,000 although it had to be borne in mind that there was a risk to that position as it was only half way through the year. There had been a slight overspend on the capital budget due to incurring a higher than predicted expenditure on Disabled Facilities Grants; however, as the Council had a large grant allocation from central government to pay for those it was not depleting the Council's capital allocation. In addition, the capital programme still included a budget of £6.6million to secure a commercial investment acquisition which was now profiled to happen in the next quarter of the financial year. The Council had reviewed a number of opportunities in the current year but none had come to fruition to date. Appendix C to the report provided a summary of the current usage of available reserves. Whilst the quarter two position showed a significant balance, it was the expectation that this would be spent in the future. The finance team had asked all departments for updates on their plans to ensure earmarked reserves would be used for their intended purpose or released back to the general fund.
- 55.4 Referring to the mid-year treasury management report, the Head of Finance and Asset Management explained that, at this point, treasury investment activities had resulted in an average return of 1.38% on investments which resulted in a surplus of £7,847 - this was considered to be an excellent return given the impact of sustained low rates during the investment period and was commensurate with the risk taken on investments. It was the intention to increase investment in similar amounts in the second half of the year therefore boosting the interest received by the Council.
- 55.5 During the discussion which ensued, a Member questioned whether it was correct that Public Works Loan Board (PWL) interest rates were due to increase by 1%. In response, the Head of Finance and Asset Management confirmed that the increase had already happened. The announcement had been a complete surprise to local authorities and had affected all types of borrowing for all durations. He understood the intention was to reign in the commercial activity being undertaken by Councils as well as controlling the level of borrowing. The change had had a slight impact on that but would be more detrimental to housing and redevelopment schemes which was unlikely to have been the intention. Unfortunately, that approach meant the PWLB was becoming uncompetitive and borrowers were being encouraged to borrow from the market instead; the Head of Finance and Asset Management was of the view that this may slow down borrowing but was unlikely to deter local authorities. In terms of recycling credits and contamination, a Member questioned whether the problem had been anticipated. In response, the Head of Finance and Asset Management explained that some contamination was anticipated but the levels found were far in excess of what was expected. The

waste team was working with the contractor to identify the contaminants and the issue had been flagged up for next year's budget. Unfortunately, many authorities were suffering from the same issues so there was work to be done. Members welcomed a briefing note on the problem identifying the level and type of contamination and what was being done to address it and the Chief Executive undertook to enable a discussion at an informal meeting.

55.6 Accordingly, it was

**RESOLVED:** That the financial performance information for the second quarter of 2019/20 be **NOTED**.

## **EX.56 DIGITAL STRATEGY**

56.1 The report of the Head of Corporate Services, circulated at Pages No. 33-41, set out a new Digital Strategy for the Council which Members were asked to approve.

56.2 In introducing the report, the Lead Member for Customer Focus explained that, over the last few years, the Council had been catching up in terms of its digital 'presence'; however, it was now one of the leading authorities in terms of embracing digital technology. The strategy before the Committee was about what the Council was aspiring to do and contained three themes as set out in Paragraph 2.2 of the report: digital customer; digital workforce; and digital place. In explaining the themes, he advised that "digital customer" referred to the Council wanting to interact with customers in a way that suited them and to improve how it communicated with them i.e. keeping them updated automatically without the need to telephone or email. Digital workforce was about supporting the 'one Council' approach to the Council's commercialisation and business transformation journey with the digital approach aiming to drive improvements and efficiencies and create an environment where Members and staff were empowered to make positive change. Digital place referred to the importance of working with partners to increase the capability of those who were digitally excluded as well as those who were online but lacked the confidence and knowledge to make the most of it. Each of these was supported by five principles: to put the customer first – digital by preference but access for all; make digital services as simple as possible; embrace change and show openness to new ideas; have a 'one Council' approach so everyone was pulling in the same direction; and to use evidence and insights to drive decision-making.

56.3 In response to a query, the Corporate Services Manager confirmed that the IT and Digital Teams would be undertaking the review of the Council's website with engagement from services across the Council. The Digital Strategy would sit alongside the Communications Strategy which was also about how people communicated with the Council, and vice-versa, and both were important to ensure access for all.

56.4 Accordingly, it was

**RESOLVED:** That the Digital Strategy be **APPROVED**.

## **EX.57 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE**

57.1 The report of the Head of Corporate Services, circulated at Pages No. 42-45, provided information about the approach and scope of a corporate peer challenge and asked Members to endorse the undertaking of the peer challenge process for the Council.

- 57.2 Members were advised that the report before the Committee would formally set the Council in motion to prepare for the corporate peer challenge which would take place during week commencing 3 March 2020. The process was aimed at improving the Council and provided a real learning opportunity through a 'critical friend' approach. The Head of Corporate Services explained that the peer challenge was not an inspection; it did not deliver a scored assessment; it was not a detailed service assessment; it was not driven by external requirements; and it was not reported to government. The scope of each peer challenge included a general health check on five core components which included: understanding of local context and priority setting; financial planning and viability; political and managerial leadership; governance and decision-making; and organisational capacity. In addition, the Council had asked the peer challenge team to look at whether the Council was set up organisationally to successfully deliver its growth plans and ambitions; whether it could be confident in the delivery of the garden communities projects; and whether it had the ability and capacity to deliver the new Council Plan.
- 57.3 In respect of the team which visited the Council, the Head of Corporate Services advised that there would usually be between five and six members which included a Local Government Association (LGA) representative. There would also be a Chief Executive lead along with Member representation which would reflect the general political make-up of Tewkesbury Borough Council. As background information for the team, the Council would need to produce a short position statement which would serve as the Terms of Reference for the peer challenge and would provide a brief to the team in terms of its focus. During the course of the peer challenge, the team would meet with a variety of stakeholders including staff and partners. At the conclusion of the challenge, a presentation of the key findings would be made by the peer challenge lead and it was common practice for all internal participants to be invited to that presentation. Following that a formal report would be produced, usually within six to eight weeks of the conclusion of the challenge. From that report an action plan was developed which was approved by Council and monitored through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 57.4 The Chief Executive advised that the Local Government Association funded the process and there was great interest from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government in the quality of the peer challenges carried out; it had been suggested that, if local authorities did not engage in the process, the government may return to some form of inspection process instead as it was expected that Councils would open themselves up to external scrutiny. In response to a query from a Member, it was advised that the Council had previously been found to be 'punching above its weight'; however, it was understood that there were still areas that could be improved upon. The Chief Executive indicated that he had recently been a peer reviewer and there were lessons which he had learnt from that process as well – he felt the whole experience was a great way to exchange good practice and to learn lessons from each other.
- 57.5 Accordingly, it was

**RESOLVED:** That the undertaking of a Corporate Peer Challenge be  
**ENDORSED.**

**EX.58 HIGH STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE**

- 58.1 The report of the Head of Development Services, circulated at Pages No. 46-49, advised Members of the content and progress of the preparation of the High Street Heritage Action Zone bid and asked for authority to be delegated to the Head of Development Services to work up the programme design document and to submit it to Historic England in line with the deadlines. If the bid was successful, authority would also be delegated to the Head of Development Services to take all necessary steps to implement the programme.
- 58.2 The Head of Development Services explained that, in July 2019, the Council had submitted an expression of interest to Historic England to be accepted onto a grant aided scheme called High Streets Heritage Action Zone and, in September, the Council had received confirmation that Tewkesbury had been successful in securing a place in the scheme. This was a nationwide initiative designed to secure lasting improvements to historic high streets for the communities that used them. The project programme lasted for four years and consisted of a number of grant funded initiatives to develop and implement physical changes in the high street and to strategic heritage buildings. The project would include community engagement as appropriate and also provide access to funding and training for local cultural and community groups to engage in a cultural programme to celebrate their high street. The Council had until 6 December to submit a programme design for the project setting out in detail the elements of each chosen project with timescales and costings and a commitment from relevant community groups; the funding would start in April 2020 and last for up to four years.
- 58.3 Tewkesbury Borough Council's bid for physical interventions included facilitating investment in the redevelopment of the Healings Mill site; to assess and implement improvements to the public realm within the High Street and Quay Street including measures to improve the pedestrian experience, interpretation and signposting of the historic environment, installation of public art and improvements to alleys; this would also improve the public realm linking the Abbey to the High Street; and to manage a grant scheme for shopfront and façade improvements including promotion of habitation above historic shops and the promotion of the use of traditional skills and materials for repair. A component of the bid was that the Council would set up, but not control, a 'cultural consortium' consisting of six to eight local community groups (from business groups to amenity societies and schools etc.). The purpose of the consortium was to initiate cultural community based activities and leave a legacy of skills.
- 58.4 It was suggested that there should be a mechanism for consultation with local Members within the process and accordingly, it was proposed, seconded and

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the content and preparation of the Heritage Action Zone Bid be **NOTED**.
2. That authority be delegated to the Head of Development Services to work up the Programme Design Document and to submit it to Historic England in line with the deadlines and, if successful, to take all necessary steps, including appropriate Member consultation, to implement the programme.

The meeting closed at 2:50 pm