

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive Committee held remotely on
Wednesday, 10 June 2020 commencing at 4:00 pm**

Present:

Chair
Vice Chair

Councillor R A Bird
Councillor J R Mason

and Councillors:

G F Blackwell, M Dean, M A Gore, D J Harwood, M L Jordan (Substitute for R J Stanley),
E J MacTiernan, C Softley, M G Sztymiak and R J E Vines

EX.1 ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 1.1 The Chair advised that the meeting was being held under the emergency provisions of the Coronavirus Act 2020 and, specifically, The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020. The meeting was being broadcast live via the internet, it was not being recorded by the Council but, under the usual transparency rules, it may be being recorded by others.
- 1.2 The Committee was advised that the Chair had used his discretion to alter the order of the Agenda so that Agenda Item 7 – COVID-19 Financial Impact Analysis – would be taken before Agenda Item 6 – COVID-19 Recovery Plan.

EX.2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

- 2.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor R J Stanley.
Councillor M L Jordan would be acting as a substitute for the meeting.

EX.3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 There were no declarations of interest made on this occasion.

EX.4 MINUTES

- 4.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2020, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record.

EX.5 ITEMS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

- 5.1 There were no items from members of the public.

EX.6 COVID-19 FINANCIAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

- 6.1 The report of the Head of Finance and Asset Management, circulated at Pages No. 16-24, updated Members on the significant financial impact of Coronavirus and asked the Committee to earmark monies to support the financial needs of the Council in the current year and in future years. Members were asked to note the current financial impact estimate and acknowledge the financial challenge faced by the Council as a result of COVID-19; to approve the setting aside of the business rates collection fund surplus to support the financial needs of the Council arising from COVID-19; and to approve the principle of revising base estimates for the second half of the current year.
- 6.2 The Head of Finance and Asset Management explained that, from early April the Finance team had been monitoring the potential impacts of COVID-19 and the estimates in the report from mid-May were in line with the forecast made to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Appendix A to the report set out the detailed forecast and highlighted a central estimated cost of just under £2.8 million. The report also set out the low and high positions which were 50% and 150% of the central case. The £2.8million had been offset by the support already provided by the government which left £1.8million to be financed by the Council. £3.5million was set to be released from the business rates provision which provided some funding to help cover the cost of COVID-19 in the current year and going forward. This meant the Council was in a good position to meet the deficits faced and unlikely to need to issue a Section 114 Notice this year; however, it would need a pragmatic approach to its spending plans given the financial uncertainties faced in all funding streams. The Council would need to pay a levy before it could get the benefit of the release of provisions and there was likely to be a need to reduce some year-end reserves because of that.
- 6.3 In response to a query regarding the recovery period, the Head of Finance and Asset Management advised that the figures had been based on a three-month lockdown and then a varying recovery period – the higher level of impact allowed for a second spike in the pandemic. He felt it was unlikely there would be another funding round in the near future as the government was taking stock of financial returns from all authorities and would probably wait until the end of the summer to assess the actual impact of COVID-19. This week he had spoken to colleagues in the south west and they were putting their case to the government as a region, rather than individually, which it was hoped would mean the government would better understand the financial challenges and look to compensate in future years as well as in the current year.
- 6.4 In response to a Member's query in relation to the Council's business rates provision, the Head of Finance and Asset Management confirmed that it was not shown in the reports to the government so it should not cause the Council to be penalised when receiving funding. In addition, any funding made available was likely to be based on a general formula on the government's priority areas such as homelessness and social care; there were other areas, such as commercial activity, which it was less likely to want to support.
- 6.5 The Chief Executive reiterated that the Council was pushing for government funding on all fronts including lobbying the Local Government Association and the District Councils Network. The District Councils Network was particularly important as it was managing to get Ministers to attend every teleconference and they had all been advised by local authorities of the acute need for funding; for example, he understood the government wanted to give capital funding for local authorities to provide housing for rough sleepers but the point had been made that Councils needed ongoing funding to be able to service those homes.

- 6.6 A Member expressed the view that receipt of the business rates provision was good news for the Council, but that recovery would be slow and difficult. He advised that there had been a suggestion to reinstate parking charges across the Borough Council's car parks at the end of June but most local Members did not think that was a good idea as the high street would be facing enough challenges without the addition of parking charges. In response, the Chief Executive advised that this had been discussed informally with Members and it had been made clear that Tewkesbury Borough Council had been one of the few local authorities which had stopped charging for car parking during the lockdown period. Officers were aware of the concerns from retailers, and the need to stimulate the economy, but this had to be weighed against the Council's income needs. The proposal was to use delegated powers, having canvassed the Town Councils and Local and Lead Members and taken account of their views, to decide how to approach the reinstatement of parking charges. The Head of Finance and Asset Management had also written to all Borough Members inviting their views.
- 6.7 Another Member noted that one of the issues faced was that the social distancing measures put into place on Tewkesbury High Street had blocked on-street parking so people could not just pop into shops. She questioned whether the Council could allow two hours free parking to help retailers in the towns. In response, the Head of Finance and Asset Management advised that this was one of the options being considered. Another Member expressed the view that there would never be a good time to reinstate charges, but traders could always reimburse customers for parking should they wish to. Another Member agreed that this was a difficult judgement to balance with many competing issues, but he felt Officers had worked hard to gain a good understanding of potential issues and in canvassing the opinions of Ward Members. He indicated that the on-street parking in the high street had been removed to facilitate social distancing for the opening of high streets on 15 June and the primary objective was to get town centres back into operation and allow people to earn and spend money as they wished. He expressed the view that the Council had a responsibility to collect parking charges as well as being mindful of businesses and how that might affect them. A Member was concerned that residents had been using car parks for permanent parking whilst the charges had been removed and, if the charges were not reinstated, there was a chance that people coming to the high streets to shop would not be able to park which would also be detrimental to retailers.
- 6.8 Upon being proposed and seconded, it was
- RESOLVED:**
1. That the current financial impact estimate be **NOTED** and the financial challenge faced by the Council as a result of COVID-19 be acknowledged.
 2. That the setting aside of the Business Rates Collection Fund Surplus, to support the financial needs of the Council arising from COVID-19, be **APPROVED**.
 3. That the principle of revising base estimates for the second half of the current year be **APPROVED**.

EX.7 COVID-19 RECOVERY PLAN

- 7.1 The report of the Deputy Chief Executive, circulated at Pages No. 9-15, set out the principles and a framework for the development of the Tewkesbury Borough Council's COVID-19 recovery plan. Members were asked to approve the allocation of £500,000 from the business rates collection fund surplus to support the recovery plan; and to agree that Officers prepare a detailed recovery plan based on the

- principles and framework set out in the report and the subsequent adoption of the plan.
- 7.2 The Deputy Chief Executive explained that COVID-19 had presented local authorities, businesses and the community at large with challenges that had not been experienced in recent times. Across Gloucestershire, there had been a collective effort by all partners to protect, shield and support communities, distribute grant funding to businesses and revise the ways they worked, in order to manage the crisis collectively. It was now important that Tewkesbury Borough Council started to look to the future and, in particular, the rebuilding and recovery phases that would mean it could look to help businesses, communities and the economy at large to bounce back with even stronger resolve and resilience.
- 7.3 The Deputy Chief Executive explained that recovering from COVID-19 would take a long time which was why it was important that the recovery mechanisms adopted were deliverable, financially viable and, importantly, could be sustained. The report set out a suggestion of close alignment between the recovery plan and the 2020–24 Council Plan. The Council Plan set out the Council's priorities across a broad spectrum of initiatives, including strategic growth, economic development, community development and a sustainable environment and the suggested alignment would ensure the key actions set out in the recovery plan were recognised as being of strategic importance and would allow monitoring of progress through the Council's performance tracker programme. In addition, it would enable the Council to use many of its existing governance arrangements e.g. Executive Committee, Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Transform Working Group and Council to oversee and manage its response to COVID-19. Locally, the Council's recovery plan would need to reflect the national approach of setting out the short, medium and long term support needed to address the challenges associated with COVID-19 and it was suggested that this could be done by considering the need to refocus, recover and rebuild communities, businesses and the voluntary sector.
- 7.4 Members were advised that refocusing would reflect the short-term analysis of the implications of COVID-19; the Council would work closely with partners to understand how and what resources may be needed to refocus and where opportunities to collaborate on emerging recovery plans could help gain a better understanding of what recovery looked like. Recovery would reflect the medium term, primarily focussing on the creation of a recovery plan that set out the strategy and actions that would support businesses, communities and voluntary groups, allowing them to survive, stabilise and adapt to the challenges of COVID-19. Rebuilding reflected the longer-term measures required to allow businesses, communities and voluntary groups to rebuild and develop resilience to a post COVID-19 environment.
- 7.5 The recovery plan would detail key actions, milestone dates and Officers responsible for leading on each work stream and the Executive Committee would play an important role as the recovery process developed in terms of community support and community contact. Those areas would continue to be needed as the Council moved into recovery planning. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would take a key role in the monitoring and management of the recovery plan, together with the process of broader Member engagement.
- 7.6 In terms of financial provision, this would need to be made for managing the recovery phase, identifying where additional resources may be required to implement recovery measures and evaluating the ongoing impact of reduced income streams. Critical to the recovery plan would be the need to continue to support businesses; in the short term, almost £16million of business grants had been paid to over 1,300 eligible businesses in the borough. The ongoing gathering of business intelligence, predominantly through the Growth Hub, would determine what businesses needed from the Council in the medium to long term. There would

also be a continuation of close working with business partners, including Gloucestershire First Local Enterprise Partnership (GFirst LEP), the Federation of Small Businesses and Town Trader federations, to ensure contribution to the regional economic recovery process. The county wide Community Health Hub had been incredibly successful, with over 1,500 calls made to Council staff, by those either needing support or offering help, since its inception in March; however, the immediate function of the hub - that of connecting those who could offer support to those that needed it - would inevitably come to an end in due course and the recovery plan would detail how any current dependencies would be managed or transitioned to longer term support measures. It would also identify which organisations were best placed to provide that support and, in particular, establish the medium and long term roles of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Alliance, Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) and Caring for Communities and People (CCP) which would be important as part of a refocused community support programme in the 'recover' and 'rebuild' phases. With regard to homelessness and rough sleeping, the pandemic had seen a substantial rise in those presenting as homeless as self-isolation and social distancing measures had been initiated. In Gloucestershire, a COVID-19 Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Cell was initiated as part of the local response and, at present, there were around 145 people in temporary hotel accommodation in the county. The key task would be identifying suitable long-term accommodation solutions and, as part of the development of the recovery plan, there would be continued engagement with the Gloucestershire Housing Associations to identify solutions to assist in the medium and longer term in relation to homelessness.

- 7.7 Referring to the next steps, the Deputy Chief Executive advised that there would be a need to consult key partners as the Council's recovery plan developed to ensure the plan worked well alongside other county plans, such as those being developed by the GFirst LEP and Gloucestershire County Council. In terms of timescales, the development of the recovery plan would be dynamic and subject to local or national indicators that had the potential to impact upon the timeline. For example, should there be a second national or localised peak in COVID-19 cases, the Council would need to return to the role of managing the response and recovery planning would naturally need to be a secondary priority. Changes in government guidance, or emerging community or business intelligence, could speed up or slow down the Council's ability to implement recovery measures. At present, the short-term recovery planning of the Council had already started, with a focus upon getting high streets ready for the re-opening of most shops on 15 June. A Council team had been created to look at all elements of that process, including overseeing the setting up of social distancing measures, signage and providing advice to businesses and supporting them with their risk assessments. Teams of Officers would be out over the weekend and on Monday to help and guide shoppers and businesses to observe social distancing guidelines, to be a friendly face able to offer advice, and, if necessary, to take action against any breaches of guidance or national regulations.
- 7.8 The creation of a more detailed recovery plan focussing on these principles, if adopted, would be presented to a future meeting of the Executive Committee setting out the detail and actions that would be implemented as part of the recovery process. The detailed plan would also set out how the recovery planning process would tie into other performance indicator metrics and service planning.
- 7.9 A Member noted that the Council was very fortunate to have funding available for the COVID-19 response and recovery due to its sound financial management in terms of the money put aside for possible business rate appeals. In addition, he questioned how Members would be engaged in the development of the recovery plan. In response, the Chief Executive indicated that a Member engagement strategy was being considered by himself and the Deputy Chief Executive to

- ensure Members had an input and that all Councillors were engaged in the plan.
- 7.10 A Member recognised the importance of the priorities mentioned but felt that, within housing and communities, a key priority was to ensure the Council had an adequate land supply to avoid unplanned/speculative development and this should also be included in the recovery plan. In response, the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the detailed plan would come back to Members for discussion at a later date. The Council Plan talked about the garden town and sustainable communities of which the Borough Plan was a large part. Everything would be reviewed in terms of services/development etc. in the detailed plan, but the aim of the framework was not to include all the detail, meaning it did not cover every potential example. He assured Members that the work around growth would be a very important part of the recovery so it would be included in the detailed plan. In addition, there would be information about electric charging capabilities in the Council's car parks as well as at other sites in the Borough, including those of housing providers, and information about supporting communities and businesses. Members were reminded that the recovery plan would be a dynamic document which meant it would inevitably change as the recovery process moved forward.
- 7.11 In terms of monitoring of the recovery plan, the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the performance monitoring arrangements already in place would be used which was one of the reasons for aligning the recovery plan with the Council Plan and using the performance tracker as a monitoring tool. Members were reminded that recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic would take a long time and it was unlikely that things would return to 'normal' in the short/medium term. Businesses were finding the situation extremely tough and communities were, understandably, very nervous so the Council needed to take the lead in providing support and advice for its residents. With regards to when the Council's meetings would return to being held face to face, the Deputy Chief Executive indicated that remote working technologies were a big part of the recovery plan and there was a lot to learn from how it had worked during the COVID-19 emergency and how the Council needed to transform as an organisation in terms of how staff/Members were working and how customers wanted to engage with the Council. Currently government guidance precluded the Council from having face to face meetings but when that changed it would be reflected in the recovery plan. The response to COVID-19 had required a focus and prioritisation on 'business critical' services and recovery would see a review of which services could now be restarted and what additional resources may be required in the short-term to enable that to happen. As part of the Council's organisational recovery, it would be necessary to put in place safe systems of work to ensure that when the number of staff working from the building increased, this could be done in a safe and controlled manner.
- 7.12 Although the recovery plan had not yet been put into place, the recovery process had already commenced and the Council was liaising with its town centres, not only on the immediate recovery process, but also the medium term using businesses as well as community intelligence. It was understood that the ramifications to the economy would be felt for a long time to come and the Council needed to ensure it was able to assist as effectively as possible.
- 7.13 A Member spoke in favour of a green recovery plan with the opportunity to spend money on issues that would be good for the environment. He understood this was a national debate but felt that, as a local authority, Tewkesbury Borough Council should also fit into the debate. In response, the Deputy Chief Executive noted that the importance of managing the Council's carbon footprint and its commitment to the climate change declaration would be key considerations in the recovery plan. COVID-19 had resulted in an increase in cycling and walking, especially in town centres, as people looked to alternatives to using public transport. The Council was actively engaging with Gloucestershire County Council around the promotion of cycling and walking schemes within the borough as new funding had recently been

made available to fast track the rollout of such initiatives, and the recovery plan would set out how the Council could provide advice and recommendations to communities and businesses on the use of environmental assets, including open green space, as well as suggesting ways in which climate action and nature could be integrated into the wider planning for recovery and how the Council could support that.

- 7.14 A Member expressed the view that he had been encouraged by the comments made and thought the Member engagement within the plan, as well as it being aligned to the Council Plan, was excellent. He was particularly pleased that economic development and tourism would be priorities within the recovery plan. He advised that the Council had an Economic Development and Tourism Strategy and that economic recovery should be delivered in that context i.e. promotion of the Borough; encouraging tourists back; supporting businesses through the growth hub; and infrastructure commitments.
- 7.15 Upon being put to the vote, it was

- RESOLVED:**
1. That the allocation of £500,000 from the Business Rates Collection Fund Surplus, to support the Tewkesbury Borough Recovery Plan, be **APPROVED**.
 2. That Officers prepare a detailed recovery plan based on the principles and framework set out in the report for subsequent adoption.

EX.8 SEPARATE BUSINESS

- 8.1 The Chair proposed, and it was

- RESOLVED**
- That, under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involve the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

EX.9 DEVELOPMENT SERVICES REVIEW

(Exempt –Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 – Information relating to any individual)

- 9.1 The Committee received an update on proposed revisions to the structure of the Development Management section of Development Services and approved consequential changes to the establishment, which had been approved in April 2018, together with variations to the Agreements entered into with Gloucester City Council.

The meeting closed at 5:40 pm