

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive Committee held remotely on
Wednesday, 3 February 2021 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, H S Munro (Substitute for C Softley),
J K Smith (Substitute for E J MacTiernan), R J Stanley, M G Sztymiak and R J E Vines

also present:

Councillors K J Cromwell

EX.76 ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 76.1 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.
- 76.2 The Chair welcomed Councillor Cromwell who, as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, was in attendance for Agenda Item 7 – Council Plan Performance Tracker and COVID-19 Recovery Tracker – Quarter Two 2020/21.

EX.77 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

- 77.1 Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors E J MacTiernan and C Softley. Councillors H S Munro and J K Smith would be acting as substitutes for the meeting.

EX.78 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 78.1 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.
- 78.2 There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

EX.79 MINUTES

- 79.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2021, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record.

EX.80 ITEMS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

80.1 There were no items from members of the public.

EX.81 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN

81.1 Attention was drawn to the Committee's Forward Plan, circulated at Pages No. 10-12. Members were asked to consider the Plan.

81.2 The Head of Corporate Services advised of three amendments which would need to be made to the Plan. The Corporate Recovery Plan refresh would need to be deferred from the meeting on 31 March 2021 until later in the year and, due to the synergies between the two, the Council Plan refresh would also be deferred. In terms of the high level service plan summaries, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it had been decided by Management Team that there would be a light touch review of the service plans this year and they would then be agreed with Lead Members informally rather than being submitted to the Executive Committee for consideration; this would ensure there were still agreed actions for the forthcoming year. In response to a query regarding how the wider Membership would be advised of the position with the service plans, the Head of Corporate Services undertook to ensure they were placed on the intranet and circulated via a Member Update.

81.3 Accordingly, it was

- RESOLVED:** That the Committee's Forward Plan be **NOTED**, subject to the following amendments:
- The Council Plan 2020/24 Refresh and COVID-19 Corporate Recovery Plan Refresh items be deferred.
 - The High Level Service Plan Summaries item be removed from the Forward Plan – to instead be agreed with the Lead Members as a light touch review and provided to all Members via a Member Update.

EX.82 COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE TRACKER AND COVID-19 RECOVERY TRACKER - QUARTER TWO 2020/21

82.1 The report of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, circulated at Pages No. 13-101, asked Members to review and, if appropriate, take action on the observations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee following its review of the Quarter Two 2020/21 Council Plan performance tracker and COVID-19 recovery tracker information.

82.2 Attention was drawn to the observations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, and the Council Plan performance tracker, attached to the report at Appendix 2. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair reminded the Executive Committee that this quarter's information had been wholly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 corporate recovery plan performance tracker was attached to the report at Appendix 3 and the financial information for the quarter was attached at Appendices 4-7.

82.3 Members had been provided with a summary of the key areas discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Chair of that Committee indicated that Members had found it difficult to offer meaningful scrutiny given the fact that the entire quarter had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee had asked that it be made more evident within the documents which areas or actions were impacted as a result of COVID-19 on the basis that if any 'business as usual' activity was not performing as well as expected then that may be an area for questioning. It had been made clear though that Members were encouraged to ask questions irrespective of whether they thought COVID-19 was impacting delivery. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had also highlighted concern about planning performance in all three indicators - processing of major, minor and other applications; the Head of Development Services had explained that this was down to a number of factors namely the increasing demand on the service, the service adapting to new ways of working and pockets of sickness absence - it was hoped that some improvements would soon be seen. Members had also had some questions about the Tewkesbury 2021 celebrations, particularly because the Executive Committee had approved £25,000 to support the project in November, and the Community and Economic Development Manager had explained that the Council was represented on the project steering group so had regular contact with it. The pandemic had significantly impacted progress, particularly around the planning of live events, and online opportunities were being looked at but it was recognised that the impact may not be the same. Members would be updated as appropriate. A Member had noted that bringing the management of the homeless property portfolio in-house had been deferred with the current contract having been extended and he questioned what the cost of this was to the Council. In response, the Head of Finance and Asset Management had advised the saving would be £18,000. There had also been a question about Council Tax collection and the fact that the collection rate against target was down 1.8%. It was explained that formal recovery action was not effective due to disruption to the Magistrates Court service. In terms of the impact on the budget, Officers were positive that a surplus would still be retained, albeit at a much-reduced level. The general feeling was that the overall impact of Council Tax collection and recovery, on both the Council and taxpayers themselves, would still be felt over the next couple of years.

82.4 A Member expressed concern about the apparent shortage of staff in the development section, particularly in relation to enforcement. In response, the Head of Development Services indicated that the vacant posts were being recruited to. The Council had no control over the timing of planning applications being submitted and had to deal with them as and when they were received so there was no way to delay/slow down applications. The Chief Executive advised that he recognised the comments made and reiterated that all services were working very hard at the moment. There were some shortages but, in addition, some staff had been redeployed to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic which meant significant challenges were faced. Members understood the pressure everyone was under due to the pandemic and it was

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's comments on the Council Plan Performance Tracker and COVID-19 Recovery Tracker for Quarter Two of 2020/21 be **NOTED**.

EX.83 BUDGET 2021/22

- 83.1 The report of the Head of Finance and Asset Management, circulated at Pages No. 102-120, set out a proposed budget for 2021/22 which the Committee was asked to recommend to Council for approval.
- 83.2 The Head of Finance and Asset Management drew attention to a number of key points. He explained that this year's budget had been incredibly challenging set against the backdrop of COVID-19, the confirmed withdrawal of New Homes Bonus, the increasing needs of services and the widening aspirations of the Council but, nonetheless it was a well-rounded budget with no redundancies, increased efficiency and services ongoing with only a modest reliance on Council reserves and increase in Council Tax. The modest use of reserves meant a solid balance of reserves was maintained to meet future challenges.
- 83.3 Members thanked the Head of Finance and Asset Management and his team for their hard work in managing to put together a balanced budget. Referring to Page No. 119, Section A, a Member questioned why a new food waste round was required. In response, the Head of Community Services advised that the current food waste rounds were struggling on certain days of the week and getting to the point where the rounds could not be completed with the current resources because of increased recycling. In respect of Section B, the Member questioned why £10,000 was required for an IT Auditor and what the benefits were of that role. In response, the Head of Corporate Services explained that the audit team lacked the IT expertise required given the growing risk to the Council in that area and the need for assurance that it was safe and secure. In respect of the Borough Development Reserve, the Head of Finance and Asset Management confirmed that the Council had previously set aside £600,000 to support the development of large sites across the Borough, and expenditure items like masterplanning used that reserve quite quickly meaning it needed to be topped up. The Member also questioned whether the other Ubico partners had signed up to the exploration of in-cab technology and whether this was an 'invest to save' type item. In response, the Head of Community Services advised that Cotswold District Council was just commencing trials of in-cab technology - all of the other Ubico partners had expressed interest and were making investments this year. The project was an invest to save item as it would make the services more responsive and efficient.
- 83.4 Referring to Page No. 112, Section 7.1, a Member noted the large budget increase in Corporate Services and Development Services and questioned why this was. In response, the Head of Finance and Asset Management explained that one of the reasons for increased costs in Development Services was the £100,000 top up for the Borough Development Reserve. In respect of Corporate Services, the increase was a range of things being put in place to support the team including the IT Auditor – he undertook to provide a breakdown outside of the meeting. The Head of Finance and Asset Management welcomed any specific questions following the meeting and he would feed those questions and responses into the budget seminar which all Members were invited to on 8 February 2021.
- 83.5 Accordingly, it was

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

1. That a new budget of £9,270,575 be **APPROVED**.
2. That a Band D Council Tax of £129.36, an increase of £5.00 per annum, be **APPROVED**.

3. That the use of uncommitted reserves totalling £431,108 to support the base budget be **APPROVED**.
4. That the inclusion of growth items within the budget for 2021/22 be **APPROVED** as proposed in Appendix A to the report.
5. That the capital programme be **APPROVED** as proposed in Appendix B to the report.

EX.84 CUSTOMER CARE STRATEGY

- 84.1 The report of the Head of Corporate Services, circulated at Pages No. 121-134, detailed the Customer Care Strategy which Members were asked to approve in line with a recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 84.2 The Corporate Services Manager explained that the new strategy would help raise the profile of customer care and placed importance on the experience of customers and an understanding of how the standard of care influenced their opinion of the Council. The strategy was split into sections; it looked at who the Council's customers were, what they were telling the Council, what was meant by customer service and role of the teams within the Council. To ensure the Council was fulfilling its promise to put its customers first, and put them at the heart of what it did, the strategy set out six themes and an action plan complemented those themes. The themes highlighted what the Council needed to focus on to achieve a high level of customer satisfaction: introducing a fresh set of customer service standards – this was very useful as it made it clear to customers what they could expect - the main change, identified at Appendix 2 to the report, was that staff were encouraged to take ownership of calls they received as well as the introduction of a reduction in the number of days taken to respond to emails from 10 to five to reflect best practice and meet customer expectations; to make it easier, simpler and more convenient for customers to interact with the Council when requiring a service – the Customer Services Team Leader was supporting changes in the Planning Admin Team to ensure customer care sat at the heart of the service and that first contact resolution was a priority; use feedback from residents to help shape future service delivery – the Citizens' Panel was a useful tool but an extensive residents satisfaction survey was required; make sure staff were equipped with the skills to deliver high quality customer service – this did not come naturally to some people so there was a need to ensure customer service training was available to all; promote channel shift to provide services in a way that was more convenient for customers and less expensive for the Council – by doing this, capacity would be freed up to support customers who needed the more traditional methods of communication; and working with partners in the Public Services Centre to ensure customers had a seamless and worthwhile experience when visiting the offices. The Corporate Services Manager explained that, since the COVID-19 pandemic, the way customers contacted the Council had changed and the impacts of that had been managed really well with very little negative feedback. The demand for the Area Information Centres had been very low as customers had been content with phone calls and virtual meetings and it was felt this success needed to be captured and encouraged but with the recognition that there would always be a need for face-to-face options.

84.3 It was

RESOLVED: That the Customer Care Strategy and action plan be **APPROVED.**

EX.85 INTERIM HOUSING STRATEGY

85.1 The report of the Acting Housing Services Manager, circulated at Pages No. 135-215, presented an Interim Housing Strategy for 2021/22 which Members were asked to recommend to Council for approval.

85.2 The Committee was advised that the current Housing Strategy 2017/21 was due for renewal in April 2021 and due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in consultation with the Lead Member for Housing, the decision had been taken to defer the production of a full new four year strategy document until April 2022. Officers were mindful of the recent publication of the Local Housing Needs Assessment, the emerging Domestic Abuse Bill and changes to planning approaches that would inform the future strategy. A strategy refresh would ensure the Council had an interim strategy in place for one year for guidance and monitoring and would also enable the production of a more robust document the following year. The refreshed strategy brought the document up to date in terms of legislative changes and housekeeping and was not fundamentally different to the original strategy in terms of substance. That approach had been endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Some important changes had been identified which had been discussed with the Lead Member including: at Page No. 186, Paragraph 2.1, the Committee was advised that the differences of affordability would remain but the specific areas would be removed; and in the Environmental Health section of the action plan, the wording would be amended to make it more accessible to all.

85.3 During the discussion which ensued, a Member expressed the view that, whilst the document was excellent, she did not feel it went far enough on rural affordable housing. There were a lot of barriers put in the way to achieving affordable housing and she felt those needed to be included in the strategy as well as tying in the importance of more affordable homes within rural locations and the importance of improving the vitality of rural settlements. She also referred to the key challenges at Page No. 164 and expressed the view that this should also list the fact that the Council had issues with its Housing Needs Survey and with finding suitable land for rural affordable housing. The Head of Community Services indicated that he understood the points being made and advised that there was a standalone document that went into more depth on affordable housing but, as part of the wider review of the strategy, this would be better reflected within the document. The Member also referred to the commuted sums which the Council currently held and questioned when they would be spent to start delivering affordable homes. The Head of Community Services confirmed that the Council was in discussions over the spending of money and there was a relatively large sum that had been requested and would go to Executive Committee for decision later in the year.

85.4 A Member liked the layout of the documents and felt it was clear to see the changes from one version to the other which was helpful. He referred to Page No. 162 and, whilst he understood the Gloucestershire Going the Extra Mile (GEM) project had been removed, he questioned whether there would be anything to replace it. He also referred to Page No. 164, Paragraph 4.2, and questioned why the Council was no longer aiming to achieve the gold standard in homelessness and homeless prevention. In response the Acting Housing Services Manager advised that he would investigate any replacement for the GEM project and ensure

it was added if there was anything. In terms of the gold standard achievement, this had been a national standard and the project had now ceased – the Council would of course still be striving for excellence. In terms of any mentions of Severn Vale Housing within the document, the Acting Housing Services Manager undertook to check it through and if there were any references out of context they would be removed.

85.5 Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED: That it be **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** that the Interim Housing Strategy be **APPROVED**.

EX.86 TEWKESBURY GARDEN TOWN UPDATE AND GOVERNANCE PROPOSALS

86.1 The report of the Tewkesbury Garden Town Programme Director, circulated at Pages No. 216-223, sought to update the Committee on the status of the Tewkesbury Garden Town programme including governance proposals and key workstreams. Members were asked to note the progress made to date; to approve the Tewkesbury Garden Town governance structure and to delegate authority to the Tewkesbury Garden Town Programme Director to implement it; and to note the financial update provided in respect of the programme.

86.2 The Tewkesbury Garden Town Programme Director advised that, in terms of the status of the programme, the Tewkesbury Garden Town team now comprised a Programme Director, Programme Manager, Project Coordinator and strategic advisor as well as an external legal resource – the recruitment process was set to continue with the appointment of a Place Manager and marketing/place promotion support. Masterplanning was continuing as well as detailed discussions with landowners and Homes England on the preferred way to comprehensively bring forward the area for development. In terms of the Ashchurch Bridge project, the planning application would now be going to Planning Committee in March rather than February due to key statutory bodies needing additional clarification on some elements. As the planning application progressed, attention would turn to the construction phase with discussions continuing with Gloucestershire County Council and the consultants, Atkins, on the overall timing schedule and the selection of a construction partner to start in the spring. In terms of the governance proposal, the Tewkesbury Garden Town Programme Director explained that work had been ongoing with the Tewkesbury Garden Town Member Reference Panel and Homes England to define the most appropriate governance structure which would ensure close working with other agencies and collectively align the delivery strategy. It was felt the proposals would reinforce engagement with the community and businesses in the area which would be critical to the success of the project moving forward – details of the various Panels and Boards which would be set up were contained within the report and in the Appendix to it. Finally, in terms of the financial status of the programme, the Tewkesbury Garden Town Programme Director advised that with the award of Garden Town Status the Council had been granted £750,000 seed/capacity funding to launch the programme and, to date, there was a balance of £290,000 remaining with commitments scheduled to spend that balance. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had announced further funding for this financial year and a further capacity bid had been made, the outcome of which was expected shortly. An expression of interest had been submitted to the MHCLG against a fund of £10 million and the outcome of that was also expected shortly. In terms of the Housing Infrastructure Fund award that had been received for Ashchurch Bridge, that had a contained schedule for draw-down as work was completed and invoiced. In addition, there was the Council's £600,000 growth fund which was ring-fenced to support large scale developments and planning requirements in the Borough; to

date, this had been utilised to support activity for the West Cheltenham Garden Village with £280,000 expended and a balance of £320,000 remaining.

- 86.3 A Member expressed his concerns over the Garden Town due to flooding issues and impacts on infrastructure. He felt recent flooding events in Tewkesbury Town and surrounding areas showed that flooding came from the east and therefore the Garden Town would exacerbate the flooding issues already faced and he had not seen any work done to address this. In addition, in his view, the Ashchurch bridge would cause major issues by bringing traffic back into Northway and this was not something he could support until it was shown that this would not happen. In response, the Tewkesbury Garden Town Programme Director advised that the current report was not about flooding or wider development in the area so there was no reference to those things in it. However, the Garden Town development should enable the Council to look at development in a more comprehensive manner before planning applications came forward so they could be looked at and understood in the best way possible. The Garden Town principles that had been developed in consultation with Members and stakeholders looked at water as a key principle and, whilst the project did not have all the answers at this stage, the points raised were all key factors that would need to be addressed. The Head of Development Services indicated that the scale of development proposed in the area meant it needed to be comprehensively developed and sustainable. All development would have a strategic flood risk assessment and all flooding issues in the locality would be addressed. It was also intended to visit other large scale development that had put in strategic flood mitigation measures to understand what worked best. In terms of the Ashchurch bridge, this would go to Planning Committee in March – there was no doubt the Ministry of Defence decision to remain on the Ashchurch base had changed what was possible in the area but the bridge still offered the opportunity to unlock development and the addition of the bridge would facilitate the closure of the current level crossing which was a nationwide objective of Network Rail. In terms of Strategic Flood Risk Assessments, the Member felt they always focused on the Rivers Severn and Avon but his point was that a considerable amount of water came from the east of the Borough into Tewkesbury and that was a big concern that did not get sufficiently taken into account.
- 86.4 A Member thanked the team for the governance structure which had been submitted as she knew it had taken a lot of time and negotiation to produce. She felt the Garden Town was a huge project for the Council which would provide the opportunity to shape the growth and enable the best development possible. Members needed to remember this was a very long term plan and the Garden Town team was working hard to get to a position to move the project forward with the right infrastructure including 'blue' infrastructure. Another Member indicated that he welcomed additional public consultation on the project, he felt this was such a huge change that communities needed to feel it was being done for them rather than to them and the best way to achieve that was for them to be involved in a meaningful way. In response the Tewkesbury Garden Town Programme Director confirmed that public consultation was part of the planning process and the Joint Core Strategy process, as well as being part of the governance proposals for the Garden Town Programme so there would certainly be a number of opportunities for consultation. He agreed that the success of the Garden Community programme would be determined by the quality of engagement with the community.

86.5 In response to a query regarding when all Members would be updated on the Tewkesbury Garden Town Programme, the Programme Director confirmed that the team was currently looking for a date for an all Member seminar and this would be advised to Members shortly. In addition, the Chair of the Tewkesbury Garden Town Member Reference Panel confirmed that the Panel had made a commitment to keeping all Members updated on the project and a series of all Member briefings would be held going forward.

86.6 Having considered the report, and attached governance structure, it was

- RESOLVED:**
1. That the progress made to date on the Tewkesbury Garden Town Programme be **NOTED**.
 2. That the Tewkesbury Garden Town governance structure be **APPROVED** with implementation delegated to the Tewkesbury Garden Town Programme Director.
 3. That the financial update in respect of the Tewkesbury Garden Town Programme be **NOTED**.

EX.87 SEPARATE BUSINESS

87.1 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.88 SEPARATE MINUTES

88.1 The separate Minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2021, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record.

The meeting closed at 5:30 pm