

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the
Council Offices, Gloucester Road, Tewkesbury on Tuesday, 7 September 2021
commencing at 4:30 pm**

Present:

Vice-Chair, in the chair Councillor J W Murphy

and Councillors:

G J Bocking, C L J Carter, P A Godwin, H C McLain, J K Smith, R J G Smith,
S Thomson, M J Williams and P N Workman

also present:

Councillors D J Harwood and R J Stanley

OS.32 ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 32.1 The evacuation procedure, as noted on the Agenda, was advised to those present.
- 32.2 The Vice-Chair in the chair welcomed the Chief Officer for North West Gloucestershire Citizens' Advice Bureau to the meeting and indicated that she would be giving a presentation at Agenda Item 7.

OS.33 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

- 33.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K J Cromwell (Chair), P D McLain, H S Munro and P D Surman. There were no substitutions for the meeting.

OS.34 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 34.1 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.
- 34.2 There were no declarations made on this occasion.

OS.35 MINUTES

- 35.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2021, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Vice-Chair in the chair.

OS.36 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN

- 36.1 Attention was drawn to the Executive Committee Forward Plan, circulated at Pages No. 17-24. Members were asked to determine whether there were any questions for the relevant Lead Members and what support the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could give to the work contained within the plan.
- 36.2 The Head of Corporate Services indicated that Officers had worked hard to ensure the Executive Committee Forward Plan was well-populated and, as Members could see, there was plenty of work for that Committee. The Vice-Chair in the chair noted that the Social Media Policy and Guidelines were due to be approved by the Executive Committee at its meeting on 5 January 2022 and he requested that be brought to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration in advance of that. The Head of Corporate Services indicated that he would be happy to add it to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme.
- 36.3 Accordingly, it was
RESOLVED That the Executive Committee Forward Plan be **NOTED**.

OS.37 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22 AND ACTION LIST

- 37.1 Attention was drawn to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2021/22 and the action list setting out the actions arising from meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee between June 2019 and June 2021. Members were asked to consider the Work Programme and action list.
- 37.2 The Head of Corporate Services indicated that, following the request at the last meeting, the Digital Strategy had been added to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for the meeting on 8 February 2022 along with the Housing Strategy which had been in the pending items section of the Work Programme previously. A Member noted that the Planning Services Review Action Plan was in the pending items section of the Work Programme and he asked whether a date could be agreed for it to come to the Committee. In response, the Head of Development Services indicated that she would consider this following the meeting.
- 37.3 In terms of the action list, the Head of Corporate Services explained that this was usually populated and emailed to the Committee on a regular basis but tended to receive a limited response. In the interests of transparency, and to give an opportunity for greater challenge, it had been agreed with the Chair and Vice-Chair that the action list would be brought to the Committee for consideration on a quarterly basis. It was noted that there were currently 38 actions, of which, 18 remained outstanding. The following issues were raised during the discussion:

P34 - Agenda Item 9 –
Enviro-Crime Annual
Report

A Member was pleased to note a CCTV camera had been purchased and she questioned whether any General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) issues had to be overcome. In response, the Head of Community Services confirmed there were no GDPR issues as it was an overt camera rather than a covert one so there was signage to indicate the camera's location. Officers were currently in the process of procuring an additional camera via Section 106 monies to use primarily in Bishop's Cleeve and Winchcombe but it could also be deployed to other parts of the borough.

22 October 2019

P35 - Agenda Item 8 –
Review of Planning
Enforcement Plan

A Member indicated that he had significant concerns about planning enforcement and felt there was very little evidence of any action being taken within the borough. Another Member pointed out that a press release had been issued earlier that day in respect of a successful prosecution for unauthorised development of land in the Badgeworth area and he expressed the view that this needed to be widely communicated in order to give people confidence in enforcement powers. The Head of Development Services agreed that the Council did not shout loud enough about the positive work which was carried out; nevertheless, she was happy to discuss any particular issues Members may have outside of the meeting.

Another Member went on to indicate that she shared these concerns as, although Members received information about reported enforcement breaches, they did not receive any details of the action taken. In response, the Head of Development Services provided assurance that all enforcement cases were investigated; however, the enforcement policy was very clear in terms of the different categories of breach, the timeframe for response and the action arising. In some cases, it may be that a retrospective planning application would regularise the situation and, if that was not forthcoming, the policy was clear as to whether it would be expedient to take action. Enforcement cases were prioritised so that focus was on those which caused the greatest harm. She accepted that it was necessary to look at how the information was communicated to Members and indicated that the enforcement webpage had been updated and templates were in the process of

being developed. The Member expressed the view that it came down to perception and, to the lay person, it often appeared that the Council was not doing anything. Another Member felt it would be a great help to understand the logic and reasoning behind decisions on enforcement cases as he was often approached by residents and had to justify and explain any action, or lack thereof. A Member agreed that public perception was the biggest concern and that applied to all enforcement, not just planning. Residents could see clearly what was not being done but it was often harder to see what had been done and he felt they may be more accepting of situations if they understood the reasoning behind them. The Vice-Chair in the chair suggested that the Communications team may be able to assist with this and the Head of Corporate Services undertook to work with the Head of Development Services to consider the best way of communicating the successful work done by the Council.

Meeting date: 14 January 2020

P36 - Agenda Item 8 –
Enviro-crimes Interim
Report

A Member noted that Officer visits to Parish Councils had been suspended as a result of resources being refocused due to COVID-19; these visits had been very successful in terms of promoting the enviro-crime services and he asked when visits were likely to recommence. In response, the Head of Community Services undertook to speak to the Environmental Health Manager following the meeting and advise Members accordingly.

Meeting date: 14 July 2020

P37 - Agenda Item 5 –
Performance
Management – Quarter 4
and Full Year 2019/20

A Member noted that the target date for the review of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in relation to affordable housing was September 2021 and he asked whether this was still on track. In response, the Head of Community Services advised that the new housing indicators were reflected in the performance tracker which would be considered later on the Agenda. These would be further reviewed as work on the new Housing Strategy moved forward.

Meeting date: 24 November 2020

P39 - Agenda Item 8 – Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel Update

It was noted that the query raised regarding the recruitment process for Gloucestershire Police was still outstanding and needed to be followed-up with the Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel.

Meeting date: 12 January 2021

P40 - Agenda Item 6 – Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

It was noted that Councillor P D McLain had asked Parishes affected by the recent flooding at that time to compile a list of issues encountered which he would share with the Head of Finance and Asset Management and Head of Development Services but this action was still outstanding and needed to be followed-up.

Meeting date: 9 March 2021

P42-43 – Agenda Item 9 – Council Plan Performance Tracker and COVID-19 Recovery Tracker Quarter 3 2020/21

A Member asked what the implications were in relation to the application to the High Court, made by Ashchurch Rural Parish Council, for a judicial review of the Council's decision to grant planning permission for Ashchurch bridge. In response, the Borough Solicitor advised that a decision would be made by the High Court as to whether the planning permission would be quashed; the Council was defending the case and did not believe there had been any procedural defects but, if that was found to be the case, the application would need to be re-determined.

Meeting date: 8 June 2021

P51 – Agenda Item 10 – Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress of Action Plan

The Vice-Chair in the chair explained that a session on how to maximise the value of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was due to be arranged for September but a date had yet to be agreed. The Head of Corporate Services suggested that the session could be arranged to take place prior to the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 12 October in lieu of a Committee pre-briefing and Members agreed that would be appropriate.

37.4 Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED That the Overview and Scrutiny Programme 2021/22 and action list be **NOTED**.

OS.38 CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAU PRESENTATION

- 38.1 The Chair welcomed the Chief Officer from North and West Gloucestershire Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) to the meeting. Members were reminded that Tewkesbury Borough Council had a service level agreement with the CAB which had been in place for a number of years and it was awarded a grant on an annual basis for the services provided to residents. The Committee received an annual presentation which provided Members with information about the work of the CAB.
- 38.2 The Community and Economic Development Manager explained that the previous Chief Officer for the CAB had sadly passed away during the year and would be sorely missed. Tewkesbury Borough Council had always had a very good working relationship with the CAB and he was confident that would continue with the appointment of the new Chief Officer who would be speaking to the Committee today. The Chief Officer from North and West Gloucestershire CAB explained that she had worked for North and West Gloucestershire CAB for 10 years prior to taking on the role; she had started as a volunteer so had experience at various different levels of the organisation. The CAB was made up of 277 individual charities of which the North and West Gloucestershire CAB was one and covered Cheltenham, Tewkesbury, Gloucester and the Forest of Dean. There was another CAB which covered Stroud and Cotswold. She went on to give a presentation reflecting the work undertaken by the North and West Gloucestershire CAB during 2020/21 which covered the following key points:
- Aims - To provide the advice people need for the problems they face; to improve policies and practices that affect people's lives.
 - Principles - The CAB service provided free, confidential, independent and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. It valued diversity, promoted equality and challenged discrimination.
 - Pre-COVID service: The majority of customers were seen face-to-face with a small number via telephone and an even smaller amount by email.
 - Locations – CABs operated from 15 locations: Tewkesbury Public Services Centre; Prior's Park; Bishop's Cleeve; Winchcombe; Brockworth; Northway; Churchdown; Cheltenham (town centre); Up Hatherley; Gloucester (city centre); Cinderford; Coleford; Lydney; Newent; and St Briavels.
 - Service from March 2020: 78% of contact was by telephone, 21% via email and only 1% was face-to-face; COVID-19 had meant that staff and volunteers had been forced to work remotely and measures had been put in place to support those who did not want to leave their houses e.g. freepost envelopes etc; 3,664 issues dealt with in total for the year for the residents of Tewkesbury Borough (3,370 previous year).
 - Employment status: Employed – 39.3% (38.3% previous year); self-employed – 4.7% (5.9% previous year); carers – 6% (6% previous year); retired – 9.8% (20.8% previous year); permanently sick – 21.7% (13.6% previous year); not working – 18.4% (15.5% previous year). This was fairly consistent with the previous year albeit with a slight reduction in the number of retired people seeking assistance. A lot of the issues raised had related to employment and loss of income which was not something which had been raised previously. The amount of permanently sick people seeking assistance was much higher than normal – these people may still have been working so there may have been an impact on their employment in the last year, for instance, if they were self-isolating or had caught COVID-19.

- Disabilities – Physical disability – 9.4% (10.1% previous year); mental illness – 9.1% (8.6% previous year); long-term health – 39.5% (22.4% previous year); not disabled – 42.1% (58.9% previous year). The long term health issue category had seen a significant increase whereas all other categories remained fairly consistent with the previous year.
- Top six issues during COVID-19 – Welfare benefits – 803 (923 previous year); Universal Credit – 336 (384 previous year); debt – 454 (702 previous year); employment – 465 (291 previous year); relationships – 360 (140 previous year); housing – 319 (83 previous year). Welfare benefits and Universal Credit issues remained high whereas issues with debt had decreased in every district during 2020/21 as a lot of measures had been put in place to protect people e.g. bans on housing evictions, mortgage repayment holidays, no bailiff action being taken etc. Employment and relationship issues had both increased significantly - CAB staff had become experts in furlough almost overnight and there had been increased domestic violence with COVID-19 and the various lockdowns exacerbating difficult family situations. There had also been a massive increase in housing issues during the first part of the year when people were concerned about being able to afford rent and mortgages – people had felt insecure about housing even though evictions had been paused.
- Significant issues during the year: employment issues; clients facing immediate crisis – 107 food and fuel vouchers issues for people in Tewkesbury Borough (34 previous year) although this did not reflect all of the vouchers sent out as a national telephone line had been set-up for that purpose; housing – concerns about eviction; Universal Credit; relationship issues; complications of giving advice remotely – staff went above and beyond to continue to deliver services for really vulnerable people.
- Service post-COVID: Retain telephone helpline service but also ensure people who were vulnerable could continue to be seen in person - face-to-face contact had been reintroduced that week; continue to provide advice via email; continued hybrid working for staff and volunteers - new volunteers joining the CAB during the pandemic had been able to work in their normal jobs whilst also spending time offering advice by email which had worked really well; working with partners so that they could book appointments with really vulnerable people on behalf of the CAB so staff/volunteers could go to them if they could not access a telephone appointment.
- Plans going forward: continue to develop telephone and email services; re-open face-to-face services prioritising the most vulnerable; offer support via the Food Bank; establish a network to ensure referrals for the most in need; offer more outreach services.
- Case study A: Young man with autism, severe mental health issues, including depression and anxiety; client referred by Community Wellbeing for help with benefits – problems with Universal Credit, issue with housing costs and ability to pay rent, client had not applied for Council Tax support, Personal Independence Payment (PIP) incorrect, in arrears with energy bills; outcomes – Universal Credit increased by £341.92 with a £1,000 back payment, secured additional PIP of £62.50 per week, worked with Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to increase housing costs by £108 per month plus backpay of £950, helped client apply for Council Tax benefit and applied to trust fund to pay off fuel debt, resulted in an annual income gain of £8,649; client said he felt less anxious and was grateful for the support.

- Case study B: single parent with two disabled children initially contacted CAB for her son who had multiple health issues and was unable to work for more than a couple of hours per week; client's adult child had issues with PIP, client on low income supporting her adult child, problem with Council Tax, client struggling to support her two disabled children and manage work; CAB identified that the adult child could get Universal Credit and helped him make the claim of £324.84 per month, helped son complete work capability assessment for which he received £343.63 per month, assisted son to apply for and appeal PIP so he received a high rate for daily living and mobility of £278.46 per month, helped client apply for Universal Credit herself and reduce her working hours to give more time for caring responsibilities with a total annual income gain of £11,363.16 for the household.

38.3

A Member welcomed the important work done by the CAB which he felt was a service that was missing from the government and should not have to be carried out by a charitable organisation. He indicated that he was aware of a specific issue with Trading Standards whereby, if a customer had a consumer issue with a company, they had to go via the CAB; however, ultimately the response was that no feedback would be provided by Trading Standards as to whether a case was being progressed or not. He asked the Chief Officer for the North and West Gloucestershire CAB how many cases the CAB had forwarded to Trading Standards in the last year and how many had a successful outcome for members of the public. In response the Chief Officer for the North and West Gloucestershire CAB explained that, if a client had a consumer issue, there was a consumer telephone line they could ring and the CAB would refer them to that number; she had contacted the national service for feedback on the figures and had reported the miscommunication in terms of people believing the CAB was the responsible body when it was actually the national consumer advice line. She indicated that another Member had been in touch with the CAB as they had been frustrated with the service provided by Trading Standards to one of the residents in his Ward – the CAB would be working with the client shortly as they had a very strong case. A Member indicated that he was the Councillor that had been referenced and explained that he had been in communication with the CAB a lot over the past few weeks. It was not a criticism of the CAB but the fact that customers could not communicate directly with Trading Standards was a real problem as he felt the system was letting people down – a resident had fallen foul of a rogue builder and had lost a lot of money as a result of that. When he had tried to speak to Trading Standards, he had been told to go via the CAB but that was where the process ended. He had since found out about a further three others who had fallen foul of the same rogue builder. He had not realised that Trading Standards could not be contacted directly until he had been approached by the resident so he had been interested to hear how the CAB was dealing with this and thanked the Chief Officer for the North and West Gloucestershire CAB for the work being done. He noted that Tewkesbury Borough Council provided a grant to the CAB each year and he questioned what the impact would be if that funding was no longer provided. In response, the Chief Officer for the North and West Gloucestershire CAB indicated that the grant meant that the CAB was able to finance the core service; even with a high number of volunteers, demand for the service did not reduce and one of the biggest costs was quality – volunteers were supported by a big team who checked quality and provided support but people often did not realise that was the case. The Chief Executive advised that, if the Council did not provide the funding, the CAB service would no longer be available for the residents of the borough and would mean that, in practice, those residents would come to the Council to seek help which would impact its services as well as public services. The CAB was a direct service which supported very vulnerable people and it was important for the authority to continue to fund that.

38.4 In response to a query about the lessons learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chief Officer for the North and West Gloucestershire CAB advised that one of the team was currently looking at the data and comparing it with previous years in order to map out where to target the CAB service. One of the lessons learnt was that the CAB could support people by telephone and email – 18 months ago that would have been thought to be out of the question – but it was important to ensure that the very vulnerable people did not slip through the net so resources needed to be targeted effectively. One of the questions that was being asked was whether the current opening hours of 0930-1630 were still appropriate or if the service should be available later. She explained that the CAB had an enormous amount of data about people in the borough and mapping that had been really useful; however, it had raised more questions than answers at this point. Initial discussions had taken place with Barnwood Trust around looking for parallels in data, specifically about disabled people, but it would be a long process.

38.5 A Member thanked the Chief Officer for the North and West Gloucestershire CAB for the amount of work the CAB did within the community helping many people with serious, and often complex, issues. The Vice-Chair in the chair echoed those sentiments and thanked the Chief Officer for her informative presentation. Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED That the North and West Gloucestershire Citizens' Advice Bureau presentation be **NOTED**.

OS.39 COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE TRACKER AND COVID-19 RECOVERY TRACKER - QUARTER ONE 2021/22

39.1 The report of the Head of Corporate Services, circulated at Pages No.133-163, attached the performance management and COVID-19 recovery information for quarter one of 2021/22. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee was asked to review and scrutinise the information and, where appropriate, identify any issues to refer to the Executive Committee for clarification or further action to be taken.

39.2 Members were advised that this was the first quarterly monitoring report for 2021/22 and represented the latest information in terms of the status of the actions set out in the Council Plan and the Corporate Recovery Plan. Progress against delivering the objectives and actions for each of the six Council Plan priorities was reported through the performance tracker, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, which was a combined document that also included a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). In addition, a corporate COVID-19 recovery plan had been established based on the Council Plan priorities, and a recovery plan tracker, attached at Appendix 2 to the report, had been created to monitor progress in delivering those actions and objectives. Key financial information was also reported alongside the tracker documents with a revenue budget statement attached at Appendix 3 to the report, a capital monitoring statement attached at Appendix 4 to the report, and a reserves position summary attached at Appendix 5 to the report. It was noted that, in order to ensure the Council Plan remained a 'live' document, all actions were reviewed annually and refreshed where appropriate. The refreshed plan had been considered by the Executive Committee on 1 September 2021 where it had been well-received and would now be considered at the Council meeting on 28 September 2021; it was not anticipated there would be any major changes to the actions within the Performance Tracker. The report to Council would recommend that the Corporate Recovery Plan continued to the end of the financial year at which time any outstanding actions would be transferred to the Council Plan meaning there would be a single overarching strategic document.

- 39.3 Key actions for the quarter were highlighted at Paragraph 2.3 of the report and included the first promotion event under the Tewkesbury High Street Heritage Action Zone being arranged for 18 September 2021; commencement of work on a new Housing Strategy in partnership with ARK Consultancy; a collective total of £107,000 being awarded in capital grants to help improve community facilities; successful implementation of the new bulky waste service; implementation of a new recruitment microsite and an automated recruitment tracker system; the specification for the new heating system going out to tender; and implementation of a small Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) scheme. Members were reminded that, due to the complex nature of the actions being delivered, it was inevitable that some would not progress as smoothly or as quickly as envisaged and the details of those actions – which largely related to the Joint Core Strategy - were set out at Paragraph 2.4 of the report. The Head of Corporate Services pointed out that the Joint Core Strategy timetable was currently being reviewed so the new target dates were not yet available. In terms of the KPIs, Members were informed that six new KPIs had been added for 2021/22 and, due to changes in reporting, the housing-related KPIs had also been revised. The status of each indicator was set out at Paragraph 3.2 of the report and KPIs where direction of travel was down and/or were not on target, were set out at Paragraph 3.3 of the report. It was noted that a lot had been discussed previously and related to planning performance and enforcement; those matters were being addressed as part of the planning service review.
- 39.4 With regard to the COVID-19 recovery tracker, key activities to bring to Members' attention were set out at Paragraph 4.2 of the report and included: reopening of the Public Services Centre to customers on 19 July; good feedback on customer experience following the reopening of Tewkesbury Leisure Centre on 12 April; agreement of an action plan to deliver the 'Welcome Back Fund' for High Street recovery; and continued promotion of the COVID-19 community grant scheme with 139 groups being awarded £114,079 in total. Paragraph 4.3 of the report referenced those actions within the tracker which had not progressed as intended. Overall, the picture was considered to be a very positive one; COVID-19 was still out there in communities but a lot of Council services were well into recovery and it was hoped this would continue into the next quarter.
- 39.5 During the debate which ensued, the following queries and comments were made in relation to the Council Plan and Recovery Plan trackers:

Priority: Economic Growth

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| <p>P73 – Objective 2 – Action c)
Publish the Infrastructure
Funding Statement – A
Member questioned whether
the additional Section 106 /
Community Infrastructure
Levy Officer post had been
filled.</p> | <p>The Head of Development Services advised that interviews were taking place later that week. Once a successful applicant had been appointed, Members would be informed accordingly.</p> |
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P77 – KPI 6 – Number of visitors to Winchcombe Tourist Information Centre – A Member noted that the commentary stated that “Overseas visitor numbers are dramatically reduced as visitor confidence has grown; this has been reflected through numbers coming through the TIC”; this did not make sense to him so he sought an explanation as to what this meant.

The Community and Economic Development Manager explained that it should state that overseas visitor numbers had decreased but domestic visitor numbers had increased significantly as visitor confidence had grown.

P71 – Objective 2 – Action a) Deliver employment land through allocating land in the Joint Core Strategy and Tewkesbury Borough Plan - A Member asked for an explanation for the delay to the Joint Core Strategy and sought clarification as to the timetable for getting back on schedule.

The Head of Development Services explained that the Joint Core Strategy was a very complex document which was produced in partnership with two other local authorities – Cheltenham Borough and Gloucester City Councils - and also involved close working with Gloucestershire County Council. The timetable for the Joint Core Strategy was being revised to ensure it was achievable; a meeting of the Joint Core Strategy Member Steering Group had taken place the previous day where this had been discussed. She indicated that she would be happy to arrange a Member training session to provide an overview of the development plan - which included the Joint Core Strategy and the Tewkesbury Borough Local Plan – in order to give Members a better understanding of the current position in terms of the review of the Joint Core Strategy, as well as an overview of its governance and structure. She pointed out there was now a different policy framework from the one that had been in place when the previous Joint Core Strategy had been developed and what needed to be done this time was quite different. Planning Policy Reference Panel meetings had been taking place with future meetings scheduled until Christmas – all Members were welcome to attend these sessions if they so wished.

In response to a query as to whether the Joint Core Strategy process would be easier this time, the Head of Development Services indicated that, unfortunately, that was not the case. The Joint Core Strategy identified strategic allocations with a minimum of 500 units and next time the allocations were put forward it was necessary to set out the infrastructure required, when it would need to be delivered, who would deliver it and how it

would be paid for so a lot of technical and joint working needed to be done. A Member queried whether it would include all retrospective outstanding infrastructure, for instance, the A38/A40 link road, and was advised that, although there was approximately £80m of infrastructure required to deliver the original Joint Core Strategy, that would not be included. This was one of the reasons that the Joint Core Strategy authorities had undertaken to develop the Community Infrastructure Levy. Nevertheless, there would be an impact if the infrastructure required for the original Joint Core Strategy had not been delivered when new sites started to be allocated. The Member questioned whether the outstanding infrastructure would be required and the Head of Development Services confirmed that it would be based on existing infrastructure in place at that time. If previous infrastructure had not been delivered, that would need to be taken into account – it could be determined that the same infrastructure was required or that greater mitigation was needed.

Priority: Housing and Communities

P87-91– KPIs 17-22
 Percentage of ‘minor’ and ‘other’ planning applications determined and investigation of enforcement cases (Categories A-D) within the agreed timescales – A
 Member questioned whether the poor planning performance against these KPIs was likely to continue until the planning services review had been completed or whether there were any improvements being made in the interim.

The Head of Development Services provided assurance that Officers were not waiting for the outcome of the review to look at the reasons for the decline in performance in respect of planning applications and enforcement cases. Detailed performance monitoring had been set-up and applications were being tracked on a weekly basis to understand exactly what percentage were being delivered. A Member questioned when the review was due to be completed and was informed that a high level report was due to be taken to the Executive Committee in November 2021.

Priority: Sustainable Environment

P107 – Objective 3 – Action a) Take a robust approach towards fly-tipping and other enviro-crimes – A Member noted that the current Public Space Protection Order relating to dog fouling had expired in June 2021 and he queried whether it was required to lapse before it was reintroduced.

The Head of Community Services advised that, unfortunately, in June 2021 when the current Order had lapsed, the focus of the team had been elsewhere and he confirmed that under normal circumstances it would have been addressed earlier to keep the Order in place.

P108 – Objective 3 – Action c) Introduce a small Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) scheme across the borough – A Member welcomed the introduction of the scheme but was interested how this had come about as it had not been included in the tracker previously.

The Head of Community Services advised that the project had been an aspiration for the last couple of years but had been held up by the pandemic. There had only been a soft launch for the scheme due to the critical driver shortage and the need to ensure that the crews were not overloaded but a more significant launch was planned for later in the month as part of national recycling week.

39.6 The Head of Finance and Asset Management advised that the financial budget summary for quarter one of 2021/22 showed a projected surplus of £22,382 for the full year against the approved budget; whilst there were early indications that income streams were improving and there was potential for increased government support, given that the report was based on performance in only the first three months of the year, a prudent position was taken with regard to full year estimates. The table at Page No. 61, Paragraph 5.2 of the report showed the forecast outturn position for service provision, the net position on corporate income and expenditure and the resulting surplus. With regard to service-related expenditure, an overall deficit of £849,177 was predicted. The full year projection for employees highlighted a potential surplus of £377,508; however, there was a corporate savings target of £155,000 for employment costs, therefore, the net position was a surplus of £222,508. The service areas contributing to the surplus were outlined at Page No. 62, Paragraph 5.4 of the report, and included deletion of the Chief Executive post. Payments to third parties highlighted a small projected overspend of £75,005 with the main element of that relating to extra payment being made to attract and retain drivers at Ubico; Members would be aware of the national driver shortage and waste services were not immune to that. Ubico was looking at a range of incentives for drivers, one of which was an increased market supplement of £2.30 per hour which would cost the Council an additional £50,000. With regard to COVID-19 impacts, staff continued to work in the business cell administering business grants, there were additional costs for the provision of waste and recycling services and continued support to Tewkesbury Leisure Centre, although it was anticipated the latter would cease in the near future.

39.7 The expenditure associated with corporate activities showed an estimated surplus of £871,559 for the financial year. The Council's commercial property portfolio was currently predicting a small deficit of £50,000 on the year as a result of the temporary void at one office unit and the inducements offered to secure leases at the Clevedon units. That deficit could be offset by rental income for one of the units

at the Tipton site where heads of terms for a long term lease were currently being agreed; however, should the commercial property account remain in deficit for the full year, the Council would utilise the commercial property reserve so there would be no impact on the base budget. In terms of government funding, £424,927 COVID-19 grant funding had been received and, in addition to this, the Council would receive additional new burdens funding for its continuing administration of business grants. It was noted that the level of funding was not yet known and the compensation claim for loss of sales, fees and charges had not been calculated or approved so a prudent estimate of £100,000 for new burdens and £70,000 for the compensation claim had been included within the projection. Turning to business rates, the anticipated retention of income showed a gain of approximately £1.4m from the original budget - a saving of £250,000 which was a very good position for the quarter and showed that businesses were starting to bounce back from COVID-19. The use of reserves and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) highlighted the intended level of reserves being brought into the general fund during the year, less the cost of the repayment of borrowing. In this case, additional reserve use related to new burdens funding already received for business grant administration and the use of the commercial property reserve to cover any deficit on that account. Overall, the first quarter projection for the full financial year showed an anticipated surplus of £22,382 and more detail about each service area was included at Appendix 3 to the report.

- 39.8 The capital budget position as at quarter one was attached at Appendix 4 to the report. This currently showed an underspend of £78,233 against the profiled budget of £286,658. The capital programme estimated total expenditure for the year to be in the region of £3.9m which was a lot less than previous years as a result of the end of the acquisition phase of the commercial property investment strategy. The main elements of this year's forecast included Ashchurch Bridge; vehicle replacement; replacement of the heating system at the Council offices; and Disabled Facilities' Grants (DFGs). Whilst the DFG scheme had incurred an overspend, Members were reminded that all expenditure on DFGs was covered by grant funding provided by the County Council so none of that cost was borne by Tewkesbury Borough Council. Appendix 5 to the report provided a summary of the current usage of available reserves and it was noted that £287,837 had been spent during quarter one against the £16.2m set aside by the Executive Committee in July.
- 39.9 A Member asked for some further clarification on the position in relation to Tewkesbury Leisure Centre. In response, the Head of Finance and Asset Management explained that Members would recall that previous budgets and the contract with Places Leisure included a fee of £160,000 so, in a normal year, that was what would be expected in the Council's base budget. Due to the unforeseen circumstances brought about by the pandemic and changes to government legislation, for example, various lockdowns, the Council had been responsible for increased costs and had paid the Leisure Centre £430,000 to keep it running when it had been forced to close. Since its re-opening in April, the number of customers through the door had exceeded expectations. At the start of the year the Leisure Centre was a £280,000 cost to the Council but it was expected that the quarter two report would show it as being cost neutral in terms of monthly payments from the Council to the Leisure Centre and it was hoped that would continue to improve. Another Member drew attention to Appendix 4 and questioned whether any of the vehicles that were expected to be purchased had been ordered. In response, the Head of Community Services confirmed there was a backlog - one vehicle was waiting for an electronic chip to be inserted so it had been delayed.
- 39.10 Having considered the information provided, it was

RESOLVED That the performance management information and COVID-19 recovery information for quarter one of 2021/22 be **NOTED**.

OS.40 REVIEW OF COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

- 40.1 The report of the Head of Corporate Services, circulated at Pages No. 133-163, provided Members with an overview of the key organisational and service-specific learning points arising from the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Members were asked to consider the report.
- 40.2 The Head of Corporate Services advised that the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the Council had been unprecedented; there was no textbook response and it had been a very fluid situation for many months. Pages No. 134-135, Paragraph 2.1 of the report, explained that the Council was fortunate to already have some foundations in place to support the response and recovery, for instance, the Growth Hub – set up in 2018 - meant that the Council already had a fantastic relationship with the local business network which had stood it in good stead for the provision of business advice; similarly, the Council had an excellent relationship with Places for People which had been important for the recovery of the Tewkesbury Leisure Centre and the unique set-up of the Public Services Centre had helped to facilitate a multi-agency response. It was also noted that staff were the Council's greatest asset and the 'can do' culture had been vital throughout the pandemic. Furthermore, the Council's excellent financial management framework, supported by the technically strong Finance team had enabled the quality of financial monitoring and reporting to be maintained despite the added complexities.
- 40.3 In responding to the challenges, a number of learning opportunities had arisen and the key points were outlined at Pages No. 135-137, Paragraph 3.1 of the report. Pre-COVID-19 it would not have been considered possible for all staff to work from home, all Committee meetings to be held virtually, £30m of business grants and £400,000 Council Tax support to be administered and 5,000 business visits to take place as well as continuing to deliver core priority services; however, out of adversity had come the motivation, creativity, doggedness and goodwill of staff who had adapted by being redeployed and working additional hours etc. for the residents and communities within the borough. It had become apparent from an early stage that individual services would be overwhelmed by certain aspects of the response, therefore, key cells had been created each with a clear remit: communications, business, community and High Street recovery. This had been replicated at a county level to ensure there was a joined-up approach. A Management Team Plus group had also been created comprising the Corporate Leadership Team, cell leads and Operational Manager from each service area and that team had met daily for many months. Technology had been fundamental to the response in terms of enabling staff to work from home and staff and Members had been required to adapt quickly to using software such as Microsoft Teams – which had not been well-used by staff when it had initially been rolled-out pre-pandemic. Members were advised that the move to home working had happened at speed and the longevity of the pandemic had quickly identified that staff resilience varied between individuals and teams so it had been essential to provide additional HR and organisational support. The HR team had already provided support around mental health and wellbeing pre-COVID-19 which had been a good starting point. In terms of customers, they had no choice but to engage with the Council in different ways – visitors to the Council Offices were minimal and the Advice and Information Centres (AICs) had been closed – and it was now known that customers could, and wanted to, engage online. Communications had been critical throughout and the COVID-19 microsite had been created to prevent the Council's main website being overwhelmed. Staff briefings had been held virtually and staff surveys had been undertaken on a regular basis. Social media had been a key tool, not only for the Council's messages but to promote those of other key stakeholders. Whilst in response mode it was also important to think about recovery which had led to the development of the corporate COVID-19 Recovery Plan.

- 40.4 Pages No. 137-138, Paragraph 4.1 of the report, set out the key learning points by service area and these included: staff responsiveness – services had acknowledged how staff had adapted to new technology and roles and had supported each other through the challenging times; staff resilience – a number of staff who had been redeployed had been faced with challenging conversations and additional support had been required for those operating in the community and business cells in particular; business intelligence – this was a potential area for improvement which would be looked at by the Business Transformation team in terms of using business intelligence across service areas rather than working in silos; legislation and guidance – a plethora of new guidance and legislation had needed to be interpreted across all areas including virtual meetings, health and safety and business grants etc. a lot of which was complex and lacking clarity; innovation – many services had to think of different ways to continue to provide effective service delivery, for example, use of videos and photographs to support planning applications, switching from paper to electronic storage, online forms and virtual inductions for new staff; additional resources – given the impact of the pandemic and that the Council was a relatively small organisation, it had been necessary to employ temporary staff and contractors, both for COVID-19 related activities and to backfill staff that had been redeployed.
- 40.5 A Member indicated that he felt the staff response to the pandemic had been tremendous and they should be very proud of the work carried out. He knew of several business which he was sure would no longer exist if it was not for the speed at which they had received the government business grants. He was pleased to see it noted that, whilst Members had embraced the use of new technology, it had not been easy for everyone and further training would be welcomed. Another Member noted that a Communications Officer had been employed for a two year period during the pandemic and he questioned whether there were any plans to make that a permanent role. The Head of Corporate Services advised that it had been put forward as a potential growth item to be considered by the Corporate Leadership Team. A Member was amazed to see that the new microsite had been developed in only a week and he felt that congratulations should be passed on to whoever had achieved that.
- 40.6 With regard to Page No. 151, lesson learnt reference 37, a Member asked for further explanation of the current process for advertising planning applications and how that might change in the future. In response, the Head of Development Services advised that the Council currently advertised planning applications via a notice which was displayed on site, in accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement. This had caused a problem during the pandemic and had highlighted the need to review the Statement. Many authorities used neighbour notification whereby they sent a letter to people living adjacent to a development so that was an alternative which would be considered. A Member queried whether business applications would be included and the Borough Solicitor explained that all planning applications must be publicised in accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement – if a neighbour notification system was introduced, that would be used for all types of application, including business premises. A Member suggested this would be reverting back to the process which was used previously and the Borough Solicitor clarified that the Council had used neighbour notification alongside display of a site notice in the past but had subsequently decided to use only the site notice display. It was noted that the majority of other authorities used neighbour notification so that was potentially what the Council could do instead. A Member drew attention to Pages No. 151-152, lesson learnt reference 39, which stated it had been difficult to access paper records and he asked what this related to and how the problem would be overcome. In response, the Head of Development Services explained that a number of old planning records were retained at the depot; whilst they were in the process of being digitalised, there was a limit to what could be achieved within current resources. All Councils were trying to digitalise the local

land search system so work was being undertaken with the Land Registry on timescales and part of that would be understanding the support around commissioning scanning of the planning records in order to become paperless.

40.7 Having considered the information provided, it was

RESOLVED That the key organisational and service-related lessons arising from the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic be **NOTED**.

OS.41 SEPARATE BUSINESS

41.1 The Vice-Chair in 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.

OS.42 SEPARATE MINUTES

42.1 The separate Minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2021, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Vice-Chair in the chair.

The meeting closed at 6:25 pm