

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive Committee held at the Council Offices,
Gloucester Road, Tewkesbury on Wednesday, 25 November 2015 commencing
at 2:00 pm**

Present:

Chairman
Vice Chairman

Councillor R J E Vines
Councillor D J Waters

and Councillors:

R E Allen, Mrs K J Berry, R A Bird, D M M Davies, M Dean, Mrs E J MacTiernan and J R Mason

also present:

Councillors P W Awford

EX.47 ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

EX.48 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

48.1 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.

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

EX.49 MINUTES

49.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2015, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

EX.50 ITEMS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

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

EX.51 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN

51.1 Attention was drawn to the Committee's Forward Plan, circulated at Pages No. 9-11. Members were asked to consider the Plan.

51.2 Accordingly, it was

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

EX.52 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2016/17 - 2020/21

52.1 The report of the Finance and Asset Management Group Manager, circulated at

Pages No. 12-36, set out the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016/17-2020/21. Members were asked to consider the Strategy and make a recommendation to Council thereon.

- 52.2 The Committee was advised that the Medium Term Financial Strategy provided the financial plan for the Council for the period 2016/17-2020/21. It set out the Council's estimates of its commitment expenditure and identified the spending pressures it faced and the budget savings needed to achieve the recommended Council Tax levels for each of the five years of the plan. The agreement of a five year financial plan was crucial to the Council in ensuring sufficient resources were allocated to priority areas and that the Council remained financially sustainable. In drawing attention to the Strategy, the Finance and Asset Management Group Manager referred to Paragraph 5.0, New Homes Bonus, and advised that the current assumption was that this would continue. Table 3 showed the forecast for the remaining years up to and including 2020/21 and Table 4 showed the forecast split usage of the New Homes Bonus funding for the same period of time. To date, Tewkesbury Borough had been in a fortunate position in that it had been able to benefit from relatively large amounts of New Homes Bonus funding in the first five years of operation of the Scheme. The next financial year, 2016/17, was the final additional year of the rolling six year support offered and was therefore the last substantial increase; future years would either see growth or contraction dependent upon the level of New Homes Bonus generated against that which was lost as the first years started to drop out. In 2016/17, for the first time Tewkesbury's expected level of receipt would eclipse the level of core Government support and this meant there would be an ongoing dependence on it to support both the base budget and also to provide monies towards transformational projects. The Council had previously agreed a cap on the level of general support to the base budget of 65% of New Homes Bonus in order to avoid over-reliance.
- 52.3 Paragraph 6.0, Retained Business Rates, set out information about the Virgin Media Appeals which had had a significant effect on the Council and had resulted in the Council's temporary withdrawal from the Gloucestershire business rates pool from April 2016 onwards. Outstanding appeals, and in particular Virgin Media, meant that forecasting future business rates income was very difficult and the levels retained could be very volatile. Future uncertainty remained within the scheme with a national revaluation expected to impact in 2017 and a full reset of the system planned for 2020. Despite this, and the appeals issue, income from business rates offered significant potential for growth over the medium to long-term as aspirations for the development of motorway junctions 9 and 10, and also the redevelopment of Tewkesbury Town Centre, became a reality. This meant that retained business rates was an area where the Council could look to maximise income; with this in mind, growing and retaining the business rate base in Tewkesbury should be a key priority for the Council and particularly since the Chancellor's announcement in respect of retaining 100% of business rates in the future.
- 52.4 Paragraph 8.0, Growth Pressures, set out the pressures on the Council including rising costs such as the cost of employees and the forecast for pay awards; the creation of a single tier state pension and the triennial valuation of the Gloucestershire Local Government Pension Scheme; the cost of providing the waste and recycling service; and the requirements of maintaining both the land and property portfolio and the Council's IT infrastructure. Paragraph 9.0, Capital Programme, set out the Council's capital expenditure and Table 5 summarised the planned capital expenditure up to 2020/21, together with information on the funding of that expenditure. The current capital programme would deplete capital reserves to around £1.6million by March 2017. The Council would also need to consider the purchase of a vehicle fleet for 2017 which would require an investment of around £1.5million and, although partial funding could be found through the use of New Homes Bonus, the majority of the investment, if approved, would utilise the final

balances of the capital reserve. This meant that any future ambitions for asset improvement, town centre redevelopment and the continuation of the Disabled Facilities Grants programme would require the utilisation of other sources of funding. Consideration would need to be given for the disposal of some under-utilised assets in order to replenish the capital reserves.

- 52.5 All of that information was brought together into the Medium Term Financial Projection which was set out at Paragraph 10.0 and illustrated a funding gap of £2.9million over the five year life of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. In order for the Council to remain financially sustainable over the medium term, a number of financial strategies would need to be followed to bridge the gap as well as allowing for the use of alternative funding streams such as New Homes Bonus and retained business rates.
- 52.6 Paragraph 11.0, Council Tax, included a rise of 2% each year during the life of the Strategy. For the last five years, the Council had decided to freeze its Band D Council Tax charge at £99.36 per annum. In return for freezing the Council Tax, the Council had received a grant from the Government of varying value for different periods of time. The most recent grants had been equivalent to a 1% increase in Council Tax and had been rolled into the Revenue Support Grant element of core Government funding to allow for ongoing support. It was not clear whether this offer would continue into the future; it was also not clear what the Government's position would be with regards to excessive Council Tax increases which required a local referendum for their approval. The Government may amend the referendum limit which could necessitate the Council considering other levels of Council Tax; an indication of potential changes to referendum limits was shown in Table 8. The current Council Tax charge of £99.36 was the fifth lowest of English District Councils and was over £40 below the bottom quartile threshold and £60 below the national average. Projections of future increases to Council Tax would ensure the Council remained within the bottom quartile for Council Tax charges and therefore met its priority to maintain a low Council Tax.
- 52.7 Paragraph 12.0, Business Transformation Strategy, set out that a strategic and planned approach was needed to meet the significant challenges posed by continuing public sector funding reductions and this was the reason that the Business Transformation Strategy had been developed. Within the 'Waste/Operational Service' Paragraph, a Member noted a typographical error which should read 'It is likely that the Council will be asked to purchase a new fleet rather than ~~purchase~~ **lease** it as it is more cost effective'. The Finance and Asset Management Group Manager advised that this would be amended prior to the Council's consideration of the Strategy. Members were advised that in recent times the Medium Term Financial Strategy had been prepared against a background of uncertainty and this year that was even more the case.
- 52.8 A Member questioned whether, given the uncertainty, this was the wrong time to agree the Medium Term Financial Strategy. In response, the Finance and Asset Management Group Manager indicated that the Strategy was a 'living' document which would be reviewed and changed on a regular basis; it was likely that changes would be discussed in the next few days, as well as the New Year following the Chancellor's announcement on the Comprehensive Spending Review, but the Strategy was relevant as at the current time and this was the best way to look at it. Another Member questioned whether Officers were aware of any other Authorities that were in a comparable position, in response, the Finance and Asset Management Group Manager explained that many were in a similar position; however, in some ways Tewkesbury Borough was better placed with the amount of New Homes Bonus monies that it received. There were certainly other Authorities in Gloucestershire that were, relatively speaking, looking for similar savings, facing similar challenges and looking for similar solutions. A Member advised that the Council was not one of those Authorities that was using all of its New Homes

Bonus funding to 'prop up' the budget which was encouraging. He also expressed the view that the only certainty was that the Medium Term Financial Strategy would change but the current document was the best that could be drafted in the circumstances.

52.9 Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED: That it be **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** that the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016/17-2020/21 be **ADOPTED**.

EX.53 ASSET STRATEGY

53.1 The report of the Finance and Asset Management Group Manager, circulated at Pages No. 37-61, set out the Asset Management Plan for 2016-2020 which Members were asked to approve.

53.2 The Finance and Asset Management Group Manager explained that the Asset Management Plan was a key document in supporting the delivery of the Council's corporate priorities. The Plan also set out the Council's corporate vision on asset management, clarified how it fitted in with other Council strategies and set out the policies that the Council adopted through its asset management activities. It also highlighted the importance of proactive and dynamic management of the asset portfolio. The new four year Asset Management Plan reflected the growing importance of effective asset management in Tewkesbury Borough and acknowledged the role that assets could play in meeting the financial targets of the Council. The document contained paragraphs which set out an introduction; progress from the previous Plan; policy context; organisation and governance; money; asset management principles; vision for assets; performance monitoring; and consultation.

53.3 Paragraph 3.3 of the Plan detailed the need for an annual Asset Management Plan action plan which would be submitted to the Transform Working Group for consideration by Members. This would provide a greater depth of detail on planned asset management activities for the forthcoming year and give Members assurance that assets were being maintained and used to meet the Council's priorities. Paragraph 5.0 referred to the money required for the Plan and key to it was the suggestion that, in addition to the one-off investment of capital resources, the Council should also make available reactive maintenance monies through its general fund revenue budget. The Council had not had a cash backed planned maintenance programme in place for a number of years and, whilst a desire to restrict non-essential spending during a time of austerity was understandable, the ongoing lack of a planned maintenance programme was not sustainable and was an unnecessary risk to the Council. A full 25 year costed programme over the full portfolio would be developed during 2016 and presented to Members in due course; with the aim being to provide annual contributions to a sinking fund to meet known maintenance needs so that large ad-hoc sums were not sought. Paragraph 6.0 set out the asset management principles and, therefore, what the Council hoped to achieve from its assets going forward; this included whether the Council wanted to own assets to meet its needs; to have efficient buildings; good facilities management; a planned, coordinated and informed approach to maintenance; and to take advantage of investment opportunities – it was a key part of the Plan going forward that the Council should broaden its commercial estate and widen its current base. Paragraph 7.0 set out the vision for the assets and Paragraph 8.0 set out a suite of performance indicators which would help the Asset Management Team run the assets and report on them more fully.

53.4 Referring to the Roses Theatre, a Member indicated that he had recently been to a ballet performance and had been highly impressed at the refurbishment that had

taken place. He felt that it looked good and offered a much more open feeling. He was of the view that, although it was still a relatively small Theatre, it was obviously thinking smarter and the investment seemed to have been used in the right way. In response, the Deputy Chief Executive thanked the Member for his comments. She felt that the project had reinforced the role that the Asset Team played in these schemes and felt that the work undertaken had been a credit to everyone involved, both from the Theatre and from the Council Offices. Another Member referred to Paragraph B, Efficient Buildings, in the 'Asset Management Principles' section and questioned whether the Council actually had a duty to cut carbon emissions. In response, the Finance and Asset Management Group Manager advised that, whilst the Council did not have a legal duty in this regard, it did have a moral duty. In addition, the Chief Executive explained that clearly the country had a duty to reduce carbon emissions and, as a public body, there was a need for the Council to follow that line. One of the main issues for the Council was that carbon costed a lot of money so, as part of service efficiency, this made sense. In response, the Member indicated that his concern was not as much about the wording in the report as it was about the finances and the way the Council managed its assets. In response, the Chief Executive indicated that the Council had no set targets as the current Council Plan had not included them; this meant there was currently no corporate management approach, however, Officers had looked at service by service savings. He explained that a similar question had been raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recently in terms of where the Council was with its approach to environmental issues and the Chief Executive had advised that it was the intention that a report would be submitted in due course to advise where the Council was in that regard and what it had done thus far. He was of the view that the issues discussed within that Paragraph were more about the use of electricity; fuel in vehicles; fuel for heating etc. than carbon. In terms of photovoltaics on the Council Offices building, the Finance and Asset Management Group Manager explained that this had been looked at when the building had been refurbished but at that time it had been removed from the project. It had now been revisited and a suitable scheme had been put together which was far more efficient and would offer the Council savings. Referring to the Nottingham Declaration on climate change, a Member expressed the belief that the Council had signed up to the Agreement and that this had included a commitment to reducing carbon emissions. She felt that this ought to be reviewed so that Officers knew exactly what the commitment to carbon reduction was.

53.5 In terms of the Council Offices building, a Member pointed out that the lighting in the Committee Room was terrible and very expensive and she questioned when that area would be considered for updating. In response, the Finance and Asset Management Group Manager explained that the building was being reviewed on an ongoing basis with discussions being held with partners about the use of the ground and top floors. There was a need to refurbish both of those areas and this would be included in the transformation programme at some point.

53.6 Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED: That the Asset Management Plan 2016-2020 be
APPROVED.

EX.54 VOLUNTEERING POLICY FOR EMPLOYEES OF TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

54.1 The report of the Corporate Services Group Manager, circulated at Pages No. 62-80, attached a Volunteering Policy for Employees at Tewkesbury Borough Council

which Members were asked to approve.

- 54.2 The Deputy Chief Executive advised the Committee that promoting and enabling healthy and active communities was a key priority for the Council given the need to reduce dependency on traditional state services and to build self-reliance. The Council's employees played an important role in supporting the Borough's many and varied communities as part of its day to day duties; however staff could also play a greater direct role in assisting community projects through an active volunteering approach. The Government had signalled its intention, within the current term of Parliament, to make it compulsory for all employers to offer schemes to employees to allow them to be volunteers; the Council was preparing for that policy requirement by introducing a workforce policy to encourage volunteering by its staff. There were significant benefits for both the individual employee and the wider community and employee volunteering was well established within a number of national businesses as a significant managerial tool to increase efficiency and maximise workforce potential.
- 54.3 There were many large corporations in the private sector that already had policies in place, i.e. Asda, Walmart and Zurich Insurance etc., and it was felt that this not only demonstrated a corporate social responsibility but also benefited the staff in understanding the community in which they worked. In order to manage the process, and to ensure staff time was effectively channelled into projects which directly assisted the outcome of community projects within the Borough, it was recommended that the Council joined 'Involve Gloucestershire'. It was proposed that the Council allowed up to ten members of staff to take part in up to two challenge volunteering days in a year. This would involve a team activity for a one off practical task which was completed by a group of employees in one day. The activity would be designed to offer great team building opportunities and give employees a day away from their usual working environment where they could learn new skills and gain a real sense of achievement. It was anticipated that the projects would be things like painting buildings, undertaking a community garden project or cleaning an area. Involve Gloucestershire would act as a brokerage of volunteering opportunities between the employer and local groups and would actively support the Council in promoting employee volunteering to its workforce and local businesses.
- 54.4 In terms of Involve Gloucestershire, Members were advised that it was a social enterprise that had been formed in 2015 in order to safeguard the country's historic volunteering bureau services but also to move those services to a more financially sustainable model. Using experience from other areas, and particularly Swindon, Involve Gloucestershire aimed to sign up businesses across both the public and private sectors. The research it had conducted had shown that many large and medium businesses currently struggled to find effective volunteering opportunities for their staff, despite their commitment to encourage corporate social responsibility, and would be keen to pay for that essential service. Both Zurich Insurance and GCHQ had already signed up and were contributing to start-up costs to enable Involve Gloucestershire to become operational within the County and to offer other services. Tewkesbury Borough Council was being asked to sign up to Involve Gloucestershire for three years in order to broker volunteering opportunities, arrange challenge events for staff, train and develop employee understanding around volunteering and to promote the approach to local businesses. The Council's Economic Development Team would develop successful case studies from the challenge days and those would be used to promote the benefits to the local community and local businesses to demonstrate how easy it was to get involved. In addition, that information would be widely communicated through the business e-newsletter, social media, business events, the Borough News and local business networks. It was also intended that Officers would work with the other partners within the Council Offices building to try and get

them involved.

54.5 During the discussion which ensued, a Member indicated that he was aware that GCHQ encouraged its entire staff to do three days paid volunteer work each year. It was felt that the benefits were two-fold as it encouraged staff to get out into the community and gave them a certain sense of achievement once they had done something which was of benefit to the community. Referring to Paragraph 10.1 of the Volunteering Policy, a Member advised that, as she understood it, the rules on Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks had been relaxed and only those that worked on a one-to-one basis with young people or vulnerable adults needed to have an enhanced check. In addition, if the check was needed for volunteering work it could be gained free of charge. The Human Resources Adviser undertook to investigate this; it was currently in the policy just in case the host organisation required it but this could be reviewed as necessary.

54.6 One Member felt that this was a good idea but he had concerns about the views of staff. He felt that the Council's staff worked hard, with some working over weekends, and he would not want them to feel pressurised into doing extra, especially if it could affect their general wellbeing. In response, the Deputy Chief Executive explained that the Volunteering Policy would not be imposed on staff but would give them an opportunity to be involved should they so wish. The proposed number of two events over a year was quite limited so there was no reason that staff should feel under pressure. The idea had been discussed at recent staff briefings and had been positively received which was encouraging. It was agreed that it was essential to recognise the health and wellbeing of staff and it was hoped that the Volunteering Policy would be of additional benefit and would provide support for a broadening of skills. Another Member indicated that initially she had had similar reservations but the Policy had been scaled back somewhat from that which had originally been discussed and she was now happy that it could work well and be of benefit to staff rather than an additional drain on their time.

54.7 Having considered the report provided, it was

RESOLVED: That the Volunteering Policy for Employees at Tewkesbury Borough Council be **APPROVED** with effect from 8 December 2015.

EX.55 TRANSFER OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE LAND OFF STARLING ROAD TO WHEATPIECES PARISH COUNCIL

55.1 The report of the Finance and Asset Management Group Manager, circulated at Pages No. 81-85, asked Members to agree to the transfer of the Public Open Space, which was adjacent to the Multi Use Games Area, to Wheatpieces Parish Council.

55.2 The Finance and Asset Management Group Manager explained that the land off Starling Road, Wheatpieces comprised 2.5 hectares of Public Open Space and adjoined the Wheatpieces Multi Use Games Area which was shown outlined in red on the plan attached to the report. The land was currently used as a sports field and for outdoor recreational pursuits by the local community. The Borough Council was responsible for the maintenance of the field and regular grass cutting. The Parish Council had expressed an interest in taking on the ownership of the field to support community sport and recreational activities; the area had already been successfully utilised by the community for fun runs, summer fetes, dog walking and general community activities. In addition, the Parish Council had strong links with Tewkesbury Town Colts Football Club which had expressed an interest in using the site. The club had 21 registered teams, including three all girl teams and a Saturday morning coaching centre for 5-8 year olds, and was growing out of its

current site at Tewkesbury School. It was felt that this site could provide an ideal opportunity for the development of youth football in the area. If Members agreed to the transfer of the site the remaining commuted sum could also be transferred for use for maintenance purposes.

55.3 Members were advised that they were being asked to agree to the transfer of the land at nil value and the proposal would mean that the Borough Council no longer had responsibility for ongoing maintenance and management. The Parish Council had met the advertising and valuation costs incurred in order for the Council to comply with the statutory requirements of Section 123(2A) of the Local Government Act 1972 to advertise proposed disposal of Public Open Space in a local paper for a period of two consecutive weeks and to consider any objections to that disposal. In this instance there had been no objections received. A Member indicated that she had recently been involved in a grant application which had seen some opposition from neighbours who did not want to see the facilities of a rugby club extended near to a residential area and she questioned whether the Parish Council had spoken to neighbours about the proposals. In response, the Finance and Asset Management Group Manager advised that he was not aware what the Parish Council had done in respect of contacting neighbours, but Officers were happy to work with the Parish to help allay fears if necessary. A Member indicated that there was a field in Northway which was used by Tewkesbury Town Colts on a 'pay and play' basis and this was very successful. She felt that the offer from Wheatpieces Parish Council to take over the area was great as it was fairly expensive to maintain. In terms of changing facilities etc., the Finance and Asset Management Group Manager indicated that early discussions with Tewkesbury Town Colts had indicated that they did not require changing facilities at this stage and, if they did want a permanent home in the area at a future time, they could apply to the Council's Community Funding Officer.

55.4 In respect of the land itself, a Member questioned how strong the Public Open Space designation was as a categorisation. In response, the Borough Solicitor explained that there was a statutory procedure to be followed if the Council wished to dispose of Public Open Space. If the Borough Council passed it onto the Parish it would include covenants on the land that the Borough Council would require a financial benefit from any future development of it. Members felt that this was absolutely the right thing to do as no one knew what might happen to the land in the future. In terms of play areas, a Member indicated that some Parishes did not want them and she questioned what would happen if the Borough Council did not want to keep them as assets. In response, the Finance and Asset Management Group Manager explained that currently there were eight play areas on the Council's list but it was set to gain more in coming years. The Council would look to target some for transfer but it was unable to make a Parish take an asset over; it was intended that those that were maintained by the Council would be managed more efficiently than they had been previously.

55.5 Having considered the report, and information received, it was

RESOLVED:

1. That the Public Open Space off Starling Road, as outlined in red on the plan appended to the report, be transferred to Wheatpieces Parish Council at nil consideration together with the commuted sum of £74,037.
2. That the Borough Solicitor be authorised to complete the disposal according to the terms set out in the report, and additionally negotiated by the Finance and Asset Management Group Manager, and such other terms as she considered necessary or advisable in consultation

with the Finance and Asset Management Group Manager.

EX.56 JOINT CORE STRATEGY UPDATE

- 56.1 The report of the Development Services Group Manager, circulated at Pages No. 86-96, presented an update on the progress of the Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury Joint Core Strategy following its submission to the Secretary of State on 20 November 2014. Members were asked to note the report and to approve the proposed actions which were set out at Paragraph 7.1 of the report in order to advance the Joint Core Strategy examination.
- 56.2 Members were advised that, following submission of the Joint Core Strategy in November 2014, the Secretary of State had appointed Elizabeth Ord as the Inspector to undertake the independent examination into the soundness and legal requirements of the plan. The examination hearing sessions to explore the key aspects of the plan had not commenced until 19 May 2015. The original examination programme had split the hearing sessions into two stages; stage one had run from 19 May to 10 June 2015 and had discussed: objectively assessed need for housing; employment land and job provision; gypsy and traveller provision; duty to cooperate; vision and objectives; and procedural and legal requirements. Stage two was then timetabled to run from 7 to 24 July 2015 and had been scheduled to discuss: spatial strategy; green belt; strategic allocations; omission sites; infrastructure; and other plan policies. However, during the stage one session, the Inspector had expressed some concerns over the evidence base and was keen to ensure that the Joint Core Strategy was underpinned with up-to-date and robust evidence. As such, she had requested that further work be undertaken on the objectively assessed need for housing, the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs and employment and retail requirements. Due to the time it would take to complete that work, and to allow other interested parties to consider it, the Inspector had recommended that the evidence be picked up at further hearing sessions to take place in autumn 2015. It was felt important that the Inspector had not suspended the examination, as had been experienced by some other local authorities, but was comfortable to proceed with the stage two sessions in July while the additional work was undertaken.
- 56.3 The stage two sessions had commenced on 7 July, however, due to the length of the discussions that had taken place during the stage one sessions, the Inspector had recognised that the initial timetable would not be adequate; therefore, the decision had been taken that stage two would still take place in July but that it would only deal with issues of spatial strategy, green belt and the strategic allocations. The remaining issues, including omission sites, transport, infrastructure and other plan policies, were moved to a new stage three to take place in autumn 2015 along with the revisited stage one session. Following stage two, the examination was paused to wait for further timetabling. During the pause in the examination, between 8 and 18 September, the Inspector had conducted site visits for the strategic allocations and the omission sites; following that, the hearing sessions reconvened over five days, between 6 and 15 October, to discuss omission sites across the Joint Core Strategy area. During that time discussions between the Joint Core Strategy authorities and the Inspector had resulted in a timetable being set that would see the revisited stage one sessions being discussed in December with stage three taking place in February 2016. Unfortunately, due to the amount of work requested by the Inspector, the initial deadline of 7 September had not been met by Officers and the Inspector had agreed an extension to the end of October; however, as there was a need for a four week consultation period for relevant examination participants following

publication of the new information before undertaking the hearing sessions on those topics, the Inspector decided that the revisited stage one sessions would take place in January 2016 instead of December 2015. At the current time the timetable for the stage three hearing sessions had not been programmed although it was likely that these would take place in March 2016.

- 56.4 Key to the discussions for stage three was the availability of the transport modelling evidence base. The Joint Core Strategy authorities had been working closely with Gloucestershire County Council and Highways England on developing this along with the mitigation package needed to deliver growth. Extensive modelling work had been undertaken to support the plan using the 2008 based Central Severn Vale SATURN model and it was generally agreed that, until such time as an updated model was available, the 2008 model remained the most appropriate tool for assessing the highways impacts of the Joint Core Strategy. However, leading up to the examination, the County Council and Highways England had stated that any further testing should wait for the availability of the new 2013 based model. This had been expected to be available for use from August/September 2015; however, there had been issues with the production of the model and the County Council had struggled to get it to a standard where Highways England could agree that it complied with national requirements. These issues were unlikely to be rectified, and the model available for use, until spring 2016.
- 56.5 During the discussion which ensued, Members expressed much concern about the progress of the examination to date and the length of time it was taking overall; particularly that it had not even begun until six months after submission. One Member suggested that the Council needed to point out the serious damage that the delayed examination would have on the County's devolution bid, as well as on the Joint Core Strategy itself, and he questioned whether the Council could request that the Inspector was provided with some additional resource to help the examination move more swiftly. In response, the Chief Executive confirmed that Officers were as concerned about the issue as Members and a letter had been sent from Andrew North, as Chairman of the Joint Core Strategy Programme Board, to the Planning Inspectorate to raise concerns about the apparent lack of urgency to expedite the examination and the problems this was causing for the Joint Core Strategy authorities in terms of development being put forward in locations that were not optimal and with the Council and the authorities involved having little they could do to prevent it. The Chief Executive felt that there was not much to be achieved in continuing a dialogue with the Planning Inspectorate in terms of numbers but that there was a need to move to delivery. He felt that increasing support for the Inspector, particularly given the complexities of the Joint Core Strategy, could help and this was something that could be suggested. The Planning Policy Manager indicated that examinations he had been involved in elsewhere had sometimes included an assistant for the Inspector and he felt this may be something that would be helpful in this case; although it may not be an approach that the Planning Inspectorate would wish to take given that the examination was now well underway.
- 56.6 A Member questioned whether it had initially been the expectation that the examination would have ended in July 2015 and, in response, he was advised that this would have been the case. The initial delay had certainly been a factor as there had been six to seven months of waiting before it had begun. In addition, the amount of participants that wished to be involved had also been an issue as no one would have anticipated the amount of time that would have taken. The Member felt that this was not really acceptable as examinations were something that the Planning Inspectorate dealt with regularly and, as such, the basic structure should be in place. One of the frustrations of Officers was that, following the further work on the objectively assessed need, the figures were not dissimilar to those originally submitted and therefore it was felt that the plan should have been able to

move along with a review in five years as was the original intention. Officers understood that the Inspector wanted the plan to be as robust as possible and therefore her requests for more information were valid; it was nevertheless frustrating that the process was taking so long. Members queried whether the delay in submitting the further information requested had delayed the examination into the New Year. In response, the Planning Policy Manager advised that Officers felt that the information had been submitted in plenty of time for the examination to continue in December as planned but it was the Inspector's decision that it should reconvene in January instead.

- 56.7 Referring to the transport modelling which was awaited from the County Council, a Member expressed the view that this was the biggest concern and risk to the Joint Core Strategy at the moment. In response, she was advised that Highways England was involved. At the beginning of the process it had been agreed by all that the 2008 model would be the right one to use; however, when it was known that the new one was on its way it was felt that it should be used. Now that the timetable for the 2013 model had slipped, any further delays would be a risk to the examination which was of concern. The Chief Executive felt it was a shame that the authorities had been unable to continue to use the 2008 model; however, the A46 in Ashchurch was not accurate in that model which was an additional problem. He suggested that the Council could write to Highways England and the County Council to stress the importance of getting the model completed and made available on time. He also suggested the potential of asking the Inspector to provide interim advice on the possible release of sites that were not dependent on the transport modelling so that they could be available for development. It needed to be made clear that Councils could not deliver housing at the speed requested by the Government if the Planning Inspectorate continually sought perfection on the plans being examined.
- 56.8 Members expressed their astonishment at the letter that had been received from the Planning Inspectorate in response to the letter sent to it by the Joint Core Strategy authorities and felt that, in the main, it did not adequately respond to the points raised. There followed a discussion about how best to move forward in terms of whether or not to respond to that letter and most Members felt that this would not achieve anything. One Member questioned how long, on average, hearings took in other authorities; the number of days to date that the Inspector had considered the Joint Core Strategy and the number of days she had had off. She was of the view that the Planning Inspectorate was not offering value for money and she felt this was an important point that ought to be raised. In terms of the length of other examinations, the Planning Policy Manager explained that this varied a lot depending on whether or not the examination was suspended and how complex it was. In terms of the number of days the Inspector had heard the examination this was unknown and he was unsure whether it was information that could be requested from the Planning Inspectorate. In addition, the Chief Executive felt that cost was important; the Planning Inspectorate was an independent agency which had been set up by the Government and the longer the examination went on for the more the Councils had to pay. There were of course also additional costs to the additional work requested and the Chief Executive felt these were valid points to make to the Inspectorate. It was generally felt that it was time for the Councils to bring political pressure to try and get the examination moving; particularly since it was such a huge issue in the area and one of the biggest things the Borough Council had ever done.
- 56.9 It was considered that, although Cheltenham Borough and Gloucester City Councils did not have quite the same urgency in terms of the need to stop unwanted development, they were equally as frustrated at the time the examination was taking and any action that Tewkesbury Borough Council took

would need to be done alongside its Joint Core Strategy partners. A Member expressed the view that there were three costs to the examination; the physical cost, as the Councils remained open to unwanted development; the numbers of houses that were being lost on a daily basis as the Council was unable to build in its preferred areas; and the cost paid by the communities that were getting development in the wrong places. In respect of Gloucestershire's housing, 75% of it was within the Joint Core Strategy and he felt this point needed to be made to the Government. Some Members suggested that a letter to Greg Clarke MP inviting him to the Borough to hear Councillors concerns might be helpful; he may also be able to help find a way forward. Other Members felt that this would not help but that the Council must bring pressure on the County Council for the transport modelling to be completed. In addition, it was suggested that the Borough Council's view be raised at the next meeting of the Joint Core Strategy Member Steering Group so that its partners were fully aware of the views expressed.

56.10 Members were of the view that the points noted within the report did not cover what had been discussed and, accordingly, it was

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be **NOTED**.
2. That, in order to advance the Joint Core Strategy (JCS) Examination, the following actions, with the support of the JCS authorities if possible, be **APPROVED**:
 - a. Raise, with the Secretary of State and local MPs, the significantly detrimental impact of the protracted Examination process and invite them to meet the Council/JCS partners to discuss these concerns. These include the failure to be able to make the required planned housing provision and the granting of permission on appeal sites throughout the Borough which are not allocated in any Development Plan.
 - b. Request a meeting with the Planning Inspectorate to:
 - determine a timetable/programme for stage 3 of the Examination; with a view to concluding the Examination as quickly as possible.
 - explore the possibility of the Inspector making an 'interim findings report' in order to release those sites for which the new transport modelling is not critical, provided that there is no prejudice to the timetable for the Examination consequent upon the production of interim findings; and
 - canvass whether there is support that could be made available to the Inspector to assist her to conclude the Examination expeditiously.
 - c. Contact Members and Officers of Gloucestershire County Council and senior representatives of Highways England to stress the importance of delivering the transport modelling evidence in a timely manner to support

the Plan and not to cause further delay to the JCS Examination.

- d. Continue to progress the 'We are Gloucestershire' devolution bid including the 'ask' of Government that the Planning Inspectorate and Government Agencies work with Gloucestershire authorities to expedite core strategies and local plans delivery.

The meeting closed at 4:20 pm