

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive Committee held remotely on
Wednesday, 26 August 2020 commencing at 4:00 pm**

Present:

Vice Chair in the chair

Councillor J R Mason

and Councillors:

G F Blackwell, M Dean, D J Harwood, E J MacTiernan, R J Stanley, M G Sztymiak and
R J E Vines

EX.26 ANNOUNCEMENTS

26.1 The Vice-Chair in the chair advised that the meeting was being held under the emergency provisions of the Coronavirus Act 2020 and, specifically, The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020. The meeting was being broadcast live via the internet, it was not being recorded by the Council but, under the usual transparency rules, it may be being recorded by others.

EX.27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

27.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R A Bird (Chair), M A Gore and C Softley. There were no substitutions for the meeting.

EX.28 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

28.1 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.

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

EX.29 MINUTES

29.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 August 2020, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record.

EX.30 ITEMS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

30.1 There were no items from members of the public.

EX.31 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN

- 31.1 Attention was drawn to the Committee's Forward Plan, circulated at Pages No. 5-13. Members were asked to consider the Plan.
- 31.2 Accordingly, it was

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

EX.32 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT - QUARTER FOUR 2019/20

- 32.1 The report of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, circulated at Pages No. 14-65, asked Members to review and, if appropriate, take action on the observations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee following its review of the 2019/20 quarter four performance management information.
- 32.2 Attention was drawn to the observations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, and the Council Plan Performance Tracker, attached to the report at Appendix 2. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair reminded the Executive Committee that the figures were for the final quarter of 2019/20 and had been unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The performance information for quarter one of 2020/21 would be the first set of statistics that would show any downturn in performance because of the pandemic.
- 32.3 Members had been provided with a summary of the key areas discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which noted that the Committee had considered the performance management report, including areas where actions or key performance indicators had not been progressing as smoothly or quickly as envisioned; these were highlighted in the Executive Committee's report at Sections 2.4 and 3.3. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members had asked a number of questions in terms of the performance tracker and those were identified at Appendix 1 to the Executive Committee's report; however, key areas of discussion included the trade waste review and whether the new target date was achievable given previous dates had been moved numerous times. In response, the Head of Community Services had explained that the most recent delay had been because market analysis had not been possible as the businesses involved had been closed due to the COVID-19 lockdown – an update on that project would be provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 1 September 2020. There had also been a discussion about the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (MAFF) site and the fact that it should be considered for parking requirements along with Spring Gardens; it was proposed that a Parking Strategy Review Working Group be held in September to seek Members' views on whether the work to date could be continued or whether there would be a need to start from scratch. In terms of the tourism review, a Member had questioned why the independent review had not been commissioned in advance of the target date and the Deputy Chief Executive had confirmed that the proposed consultants had experience in the area, having carried out similar reviews for other authorities, but he would report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as to the reasons why the review had not been commissioned sooner. It had also been agreed that a report on what the review would cover, along with an update on tourism related projects, would be scheduled for the 24 November 2020 meeting. The Head of Corporate Services had advised that the Advice and Information Centres (AICs) had been reviewed in the past and it was felt that another review would be timely to discuss whether they were providing value for money; however, it was agreed that it would be prudent to defer that review and await further information on the impact on the Council's budget as a result of COVID-19 as there was potential to

deliver customer service in other ways rather than face to face. Members had also raised concerns regarding increases in fly tipping and abandoned vehicles and questioned whether there was a particular reason for this; the Head of Community Services had advised that there was no intelligence to explain the increase – which had been countywide – although the closure of the Household Recycling Centres due to COVID-19 may have had some impact. In terms of sickness, a Member had sought assurance about the amount of short term absences and whether those contributed to the average number of sick days per full time equivalent employee being so high for 2019/20 compared to the national average of 4.4 per employee and whether next year's target would be more ambitious; the Head of Corporate Services had advised that the average within the public sector was eight days and this year the statistics had been heavily impacted by the number of long term absences; he gave assurance that the Council had a robust Absence Management Policy in place and HR worked closely with managers to ensure due process was followed if the triggers in the policy were hit.

32.4 In addition, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair explained that, given the broad coverage of agenda items that his Committee covered, questions and actions arising were naturally generated and at each meeting he ensured actions were agreed and the relevant officer allocated an appropriate timescale. These actions are then proactively monitored to ensure they were appropriately followed up.

32.5 Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's comments on the Performance Management Report for Quarter Four of 2019/20 be **NOTED**.

EX.33 FINANCIAL UPDATE - QUARTER ONE 2020/21

33.1 The report of the Head of Finance and Asset Management, circulated at Pages No. 66-79, highlighted a quarter one deficit on the revenue budget and detailed the expenditure to date against both the capital programme and the approved reserves. Members were asked to consider the financial performance information for the first quarter of 2020/21.

33.2 Members were advised that unfortunately a significant deficit of £444,000 was being reported; however, overall, the financial position was not as bad as first feared due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The position was summarised within the report at Paragraph 2.1 and in Appendix A. The Head of Finance and Asset Management explained that the COVID-19 financial position was being analysed separately and the main contributions to those costs were the Places Leisure contract payment; purchase of laptops for remote working; Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); and the additional costs from Ubico in terms of staffing etc. for safe working requirements. Income levels were substantially down in several areas but the quarter two information to date suggested an early recovery in some services.

33.3 With regards to savings, the Head of Finance and Asset Management explained that the largest area of saving in this quarter was within the employees heading and that highlighted the number of staff vacancies the Council had needed to manage during the COVID-19 response as well as providing a normal level of activity in core services. Recruitment was now beginning to take place and the Council was receiving a high number of applications to some posts which was great news. In terms of the pay award, 2% had been allocated within the budget but that had not been spent in the first quarter; an award of 2.75% had now been agreed and that would be backdated to April – this would be covered by the

contingency that had been put into place when the budget had been set.

- 33.4 An updated COVID-19 impact forecast was included in the report at Paragraph 2.6 and Members were reminded that this was not a full budget forecast at this stage and, overall, the expenditure remained around £3 million.
- 33.5 During the discussion which ensued, a Member questioned whether the underspend on employees would have an impact on the performance indicators going forward; he was acutely aware that the Council sometimes had issues when it was understaffed. In response, the Head of Finance and Asset Management explained that it was difficult to know the contingencies that had been put into place by different services, or how staff had been redeployed during the COVID-19 pandemic, so he was unable to provide a full response to that query. In terms of the finance team, there were a couple of vacancies which should be filled soon; however, the service had not been unduly impacted in the first quarter from those vacancies. In addition, the Deputy Chief Executive explained that one of the things the recovery plan would look to do was to implement clear and transparent methodology for each service area to understand the implications of COVID-19. A template was currently being put together for each Head of Service and Operational Manager which, once completed, would help the authority understand the resource implications and how they could be addressed. In addition, he confirmed that the Recovery Plan reflected the priorities of the Council Plan and, as such, the performance trackers for each plan would be twin-tracked going forward with both trackers being considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Executive Committee; this would help clearly explain where actions had been reprioritised into a different workstream, which actions had been superseded and what was still moving forward.
- 33.6 In response to a query regarding community grants, the Head of Finance and Asset Management confirmed that, at the time of writing the report, the fund was £710,000 underspent; however, applications were still being received so that figure was likely to be less now. The government had been firm in its stance that any unspent monies would have to be returned to central government after the closure of the scheme on 28 August.
- 33.7 A Member expressed his thanks to the finance team for keeping Members informed of the position of the Council's finances in a clear way even in these exceptional times. Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED: That the financial performance information for the first quarter of 2020/21 be **NOTED**.

EX.34 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME AND COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS 2021/22

- 34.1 The report of the Head of Corporate Services, circulated at Pages No. 80-85, provided the Committee with information on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and an update on the annual review of Council Tax discounts. Members were asked to consider the information provided and make a recommendation to Council as to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme to be adopted and the Council Tax discounts to be applied from 1 April 2021.
- 34.2 Members were advised that there was a requirement to have a Council Tax Reduction Scheme to support residents who qualified for assistance in paying Council Tax. The Scheme had to specify the reductions which were to apply to amounts of Council Tax payable by persons, or classes, or a person, whom the authority considered were in financial need. In January 2020, Council approved a Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the 2020/21 financial year which meant it remained on the national default scheme, as it had since 2013, but with a minor

revision of a tolerance for income changes. It was also agreed that alternative options would be reviewed to ensure any future scheme provided the right level of support for residents as well as its impact on the Council's wider financial position. However, due to the current, and likely ongoing, impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was recommended that the Council remain on the default scheme for working age claimants for the 2021/22 financial year.

34.3 In respect of Council Tax discounts, Members were advised that the Local Government Finance Act 2012 had abolished certain discounts with effect from 1 April 2013 and replaced them with discounts which could be determined locally. Those had remained broadly the same since 2013/14 other than a change to the level of discount given to short term empty properties and the levying of an empty homes' premium from 1 April 2019. From April 2020, an additional power had been granted to allow the increase of the levy charge to 200% for properties which had been unoccupied and unfurnished for a period of over five years; Council had adopted that option for the 2020/21 financial year and the premium was currently levied on 22 properties which resulted in an additional income of £61,000 with the Council retaining approximately £4,500. From April 2021, a further power would be granted to increase the empty homes premium to 300% for properties that had been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than 10 years. There were six properties that met the criteria and the levying of the additional charge resulted in further income of £10,000 - the Council's share of that was minimal but, more widely, it supported the Council's strategy to bring empty properties back into use which was a key driver for the Council.

34.4 Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED:

That it be **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:**

1. That the default Council Tax Reduction Scheme be **ADOPTED** effective from 1 April 2021 with a minor revision to the national working age regulations to allow for a de minimis tolerance for income changes.
2. That authority be delegated to the Head of Finance and Asset Management, in consultation with the Lead Member for Finance and Asset Management, to agree the uprating of the working age regulations incorporated into the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme in line with those announced by the Department for Work and Pensions.
3. That the following Council Tax discounts be **ADOPTED** effective from 1 April 2021:
 - The discount for unoccupied and substantially unfurnished properties is 25% for a maximum period of six months.
 - The discount for properties which are vacant and require major repair work to render them habitable is 25% for a maximum period of 12 months.
 - The discount for unoccupied furnished properties (second homes) is zero.

- An empty homes premium of an additional 100% is levied on properties that have remained unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for at least two years, but less than five years.
- An empty homes premium of an additional 200% is levied on properties that have remained unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for at least five years, but less than ten years.
- An empty homes premium of an additional 300% is levied on properties that have remained unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for at least ten years.

EX.35 SEPARATE BUSINESS

35.1 The Chair proposed, and it was

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

EX.36 CLEEVE COMMON LEASE

(Exempt –Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 –Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information))

36.1 The Committee considered the report and agreed the way forward in respect of the Cleeve Common Lease.

The meeting closed at 5:00 pm