

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive Committee held at the Council Offices,
Gloucester Road, Tewkesbury on Wednesday, 2 June 2021 commencing
at 2:00 pm**

Present:

Chair
Vice Chair

Councillor R A Bird
Councillor J R Mason

and Councillors:

G F Blackwell, M Dean, M A Gore, E J MacTiernan, M G Sztymiak and R J E Vines

EX.1 ANNOUNCEMENTS

1.1 The evacuation procedure, as noted on the Agenda, was advised to those present.

EX.2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

2.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D J Harwood, C Softley and R J Stanley. There were no substitutions for the meeting.

EX.3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 The Committee's attention was drawn to the Tewkesbury Borough Council Code of Conduct which was adopted by the Council on 26 June 2012 and took effect from 1 July 2012.

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

EX.4 MINUTES

4.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 31 March 2021, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

EX.5 ITEMS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

5.1 There were no items from members of the public.

EX.6 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN

6.1 Attention was drawn to the Committee's Forward Plan, circulated at Pages No. 9-17. Members were asked to consider the Plan.

6.2 A Member referred to the item due to be considered on 7 July 2021 entitled 'A417 Missing Link Development Consent Order' and questioned what this was about. In response, the Head of Development Services advised that the Order would be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate and, as part of that process, Tewkesbury Borough, Cotswold District and Gloucestershire County Councils had been working with Highways England on a Statement of Common Ground and it was that which Members would be considering at the Executive Committee. If it was agreed it would mean those issues would not need to be discussed at the examination. Another Member referred to the Tewkesbury Shop Front Design Guidance

Supplementary Planning Document and queried whether it would be for Tewkesbury Town or Boroughwide. In response, the Head of Development Services explained that, historically, the document was related to the Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) funding but in actual fact it would be for the whole Borough so that would need to be clarified in the report.

6.3 Accordingly, it was

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

EX.7 LOCAL AUTHORITY REMOTE MEETINGS: GOVERNMENT CALL FOR EVIDENCE

7.1 The report of the Head of Democratic Services, circulated at Pages No. 18-25, asked Members to approve the Council's response to the government consultation entitled Local Authority Remote Meetings: Call for Evidence.

7.2 The Borough Solicitor advised that the Regulations which had been introduced to enable meetings to be held remotely had expired on 7 May 2021 and the government had now issued a consultation paper asking for evidence on local authority remote meetings. The intention was that it would gain an understanding of how much, if any, appetite there was for remote meetings to continue, either solely or in a hybrid way, and therefore how any primary legislation should be drafted. The report before Members had been drafted from the Officer perspective of how the meetings had been administered and comments received from Members over the last year and the Committee was asked to add the Member perspective should they so wish; there was of course no requirement for the Council to make a submission should that be the Committee's choice.

7.3 The Chair welcomed comments; he knew there were a wide variety of views and felt it would be a good idea for them to be shared and then encapsulated at the end. During the discussion which ensued, a Member expressed the view that the report was a fair assessment of the issues but felt there was room to clarify the issues that some members of the public had experienced when trying to access public speaking remotely at Planning Committee. He also questioned whether the Council was considering introducing the option of webcasting its meetings. In response, the Borough Solicitor confirmed that this was being considered and the costs being calculated for further discussion.

7.4 One Member expressed the view that the questions put forward in the consultation were not very balanced. He felt remote meetings were leading the Council into Members being isolated in their homes with no contact with fellow Councillors. Meetings had tended to take longer as some had difficulty accessing them meaning they did not commence on time and the requirement to take the vote by asking each Councillor in turn to state for, against or abstain took a long time. He agreed that the Council should be webcasting meetings, as it provided more opportunity for members of the public to observe, but he would not want to see a situation where all meetings became remote – although he could see the scope for smaller, one-to-one type meetings to be held in that way. In terms of costs, whilst he could see there would be reductions there would also have been costs and this was not something which was mentioned within the consultation document. Referring to the benefits in terms of climate change, it was the case that people working from home were using their vehicles less but, of course, those that walked, cycled or had electric vehicles were already reducing their carbon footprint. He also felt that being made to work from home could cause a strain on family life due to the inconvenience for other family members of having to avoid certain rooms or being quiet at different times so as not to disturb meetings. In particular, he had missed the contact with other Councillors and Officers which was gained from

seeing each other face to face.

7.5 Referring to the questions asked within the consultation, a number of Members felt the report did that well. It was accepted that remote meetings did not suit everyone but there were those that it worked for really well in terms of being able to better fit life and work together; particularly where they had a lot of Parish Meetings to attend and could do so without taking up a lot of time driving from home to the meetings. One Member expressed the view that the answer to question five was incorrect and that Members had not had difficulties gauging the 'mood in the room' at remote meetings; she asked for that point to be removed.

7.6 The Chair advised that, from his perspective, he had found working remotely a challenge and, if it was expected that Members would continue to work from home, there were certainly some who would need additional equipment which would come at an extra cost. Furthermore, he felt that remote meetings had possibly inhibited some Members from speaking and therefore stifled some of the debate which would have been had if a meeting had been held in a face to face forum. He also felt the Council had moved to a recorded vote system by default in the way the vote had to be taken when working remotely which was an unintended consequence – in his view this was unfortunate and made the meetings take much longer.

7.7 Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED:

That the Council's response to the consultation entitled Local Authority Remote Meetings: Call for Evidence be delegated to the Borough Solicitor, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, taking account of the Committee's discussion, including:

- Delete the first bullet point in response to Q5 and replace with wording to indicate that Members missed the informal exchanges they were able to have when meeting in person.
- Expand on the point that members of the public had encountered some issues with accessing Zoom meetings when speaking at Committee.
- Include reference to there being additional costs of remote meetings as well as savings.
- Reflect both sides of the arguments for and against hybrid meetings e.g. improved work/life balance / not always conducive to individual domestic circumstances of participants.
- While there was no evidence that some Members were not participating in remote meetings in the same way they would if the meetings were held in person, there was concern expressed that there may be reticence on the part of some Members to participate.
- The Council had moved to a recorded vote by default which was not the right thing from a Constitutional point of view but also it lengthened the meeting process considerably.

EX.8 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

8.1 The report of the Head of Democratic Services, circulated at Pages No. 26-35, sought approval for the commencement of a Boroughwide Community Governance Review. Members were asked to agree to the Review; approve the Terms of Reference as attached to the report; and authorise the Borough Solicitor to determine the membership of the Working Group, in consultation with the Leader of the Council following nominations from Group Leaders.

8.2 The Borough Solicitor explained that the Council was now the responsible body for undertaking a Community Governance Review in its area with the advice being to undertake a review every 10 to 15 years. Tewkesbury Borough Council's last full review had been undertaken in 2003 and a lot of development had taken place in the interim which had given rise to a number of anomalies meaning that some houses next to each other were in different Parishes - this caused confusion for residents and resulted in issues at election time for people attending the wrong polling station because their actual polling station was further away than the one geographically closer to them. To begin the review process, the Committee had to determine the Terms of Reference and then work could commence immediately to ensure any changes could be made in time for the next Borough and Parish elections in 2023. The next stage would be to consult the people affected, including the electorate, the County Council and Parish and Town Councils. Once those responses were received, some proposals could be formed for the Working Group to consider. In terms of the Working Group membership, it was suggested that seven Councillors would be ideal and that, preferably, they would be people that had an interest in the topic as it would involve quite a lot of work in a short time. The Working Group would then make proposals to Executive Committee to make a recommendation to Council which could include things like changing the name of a Parish, merging Parishes, agreeing a different number of Councillors. A Member questioned whether the population increases following development would be looked at as part of the review and it was confirmed that they would – although population was not a determining factor in the same way as it had been when the Borough Wards were reviewed. The Borough Solicitor expressed the view that there was never a good time to undertake a review as the amount of development would always change but now would be the best time to ensure any changes could be made for the next election cycle. The Member also noted that Parishes already struggled to get enough Councillors to be quorate so this would need to be taken into account if it was decided that numbers needed to change. The Borough Solicitor agreed that this was a relevant consideration. She reminded Members that the Community Governance Review would only look at Parish boundaries and any consequential amendments to Borough Wards – it would not review the Borough Wards or District Boundaries.

8.3 Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED:

1. That the commencement of a Boroughwide Community Governance Review be **AGREED**.
2. That the draft Terms of Reference, attached to the report at Appendix 1, be **APPROVED**.
3. That a Community Governance Review Working Group consisting of seven Members be established, with those Members being nominated by Group Leaders, and that authority to determine the membership of the Working Group be delegated to the Borough Solicitor, in consultation with the Leader of

the Council.

EX.9 WELCOME BACK FUND

- 9.1 The report of the Head of Development Services, circulated at Pages No. 36-39, outlined the purpose of the Welcome Back Fund and asked Members to delegate authority to the Head of Development Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to develop and implement the action plan arising from the fund, or subsequent funds, or vary it in response to circumstances which may arise as a consequence of the need to reopen the local economy safely, support social distancing or respond to business intelligence, including authority to enter into agreements, notices and other legal documents as necessary.
- 9.2 Members were advised that the Welcome Back Fund built on the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund which had been announced in May 2020 and provided Councils across England with a share of the European Regional Development Fund to support the safe and continued return to High Streets. From 16 April, local authorities could spend the money on eligible activities and claim it back from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government in arrears – Tewkesbury Borough Council had been awarded funding of £84,931. The fund could be used to boost the look and feel of the High Streets by investing in street planting, parks, green spaces and seating areas to make High Streets welcoming; run publicity campaigns and prepare to hold events that would boost footfall and encourage people back into High Streets thereby supporting local businesses; install and refresh signage and floor markings to encourage social distancing and safety; and improve green spaces on High Streets and town centres by planting flowers or removing graffiti. As part of the plans for the next stage, there would be engagement with the Parish/Town Councils in Bishop’s Cleeve, Tewkesbury and Winchcombe – being the towns with High Streets in the Borough – as well as other stakeholders such as the business community and the County Council. Following that engagement, a revised grant action plan would be produced which would outline the measures planned and the delegation which was requested by the report would enable the Council to implement any new measures quickly and efficiently.
- 9.3 During the brief discussion which ensued, a Member questioned how much of the funding was left and was advised that there was around £35,000 for the Council to spend by March 2022. The terms of the fund were very specific but Officers were looking at other funding streams for use in other areas across the Borough which did not qualify for the Welcome Back funding.
- 9.4 Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED:

That authority be delegated to the Head of Development Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to make the decisions needed to develop and implement the action plan arising from the Welcome Back Fund, or subsequent funds, or vary it in response to circumstances which may arise as a consequence of the need to re-open the local economy safely, support social distancing or respond to business intelligence, including the authority to enter into agreements, notices and other legal documents as necessary.

EX.10 DECISION TAKEN UNDER URGENCY POWERS - HERITAGE ACTION ZONE FUNDING

10.1 The report of the Chief Executive, circulated at Pages No. 40-44, advised Members of a decision taken under the urgency powers set out in Part 3 of the Constitution as required by the Constitution. The Committee was asked to note the decision taken.

10.2 The Head of Development Services explained that in 2019 the Council had been successful in its bid for Housing Action Zone (HAZ) status for Tewkesbury Town focussing on revitalising the High Street. This was a four year programme which had been due to start in April 2020; however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic this had been put back to September 2020. The Council had worked with Historic England to make it aware of the Officer resource which had been diverted and the reason for the need to delay the HAZ work. However, at short notice, the Council had been asked to pull together an action plan to take the programme forward and that decision had been taken under urgency powers in consultation with the Lead Members for Community, Economic Development/Promotion and Built Environment. Historic England had agreed the action plan which had focused on the public realm, shop front improvements, traditional skills and upper floor conversions and a Programme Manager had been employed.

10.3 In response to a query, the Head of Development Services undertook to circulate the action plan for information. The intention was for 23/24 shopfront improvements which would be applied for on a grant-based approach for repair rather than redecoration; 3/4 upper floor conversions which Officers would be keen to explore with Registered Social Landlords for affordable housing units; traditional skills such as carpentry; and to work with the owner and developers on how to make improvements to Healings Mill and remove barriers to development. In response, a Member questioned who would teach the traditional skills and how they would be funded. She also expressed great concern about the current situation with Healings Mill and the surrounding buildings which were falling further and further into disrepair and dilapidation. Planning permission for some of the buildings had lapsed without any action being taken and they were now dangerous as well as being an eyesore. She understood that the owner had received offers for some of the buildings but had wanted to sell it as a whole project - this would be very difficult as that would be incredibly expensive. The Head of Development Services explained that £10,000 had been allocated to the traditional skills element but she would have to respond following the meeting as to who would be providing the training. In terms of Healings Mill, this was a massive project and Officers were trying to work with agents to move it forward but this was a very slow process. Another Member suggested that footfall could be improved with the inclusion of a trail like the Cirencester hares with a launch at Tewkesbury Abbey to bring together heritage and shopping in Tewkesbury Town. The Head of Development Services welcomed any ideas Members may have and advised that everything would be considered.

10.4 Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED: That the decision taken by the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Lead Members for Community, Economic Development/Promotion and Built Environment, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, be **NOTED**.

EX.11 SEPARATE BUSINESS

11.1 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.12 SEPARATE MINUTES

12.1 The separate Minutes of the meeting held on 31 March 2021, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record.

EX.13 FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR CROWN CLOSE REDEVELOPMENT BY ROOFTOP HOUSING FROM COMMUTED SUMS FUNDS

(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))

13.1 Members agreed to support the request for financial support from commuted sums funds for redevelopment at Crown Close by Rooftop Housing Association.

The meeting closed at 4:30 pm