

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the Council Offices, Gloucester Road, Tewkesbury on Tuesday, 8 February 2022 commencing at 4:30 pm

Present:

Chair
Vice Chair

Councillor J W Murphy
Councillor K Berliner

and Councillors:

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

also present:

Councillor D W Gray

OS.75 ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

OS.76 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

76.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G J Bocking, H C McLain and H S Munro. There were no substitutions for the meeting.

OS.77 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

77.1 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.

77.2 There were no declarations made on this occasion.

OS.78 MINUTES

78.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2022, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

OS.79 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN

79.1 Attention was drawn to the Executive Committee Forward Plan, circulated at Pages No.12-15. 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.

- 79.2 The Head of Corporate Services indicated that the Agenda for the meeting on 2 March 2022 was quite heavy so Officers may need to review the items being taken forward and push some back to the meeting on 30 March 2022. With regard to the Parking Strategy Review which was currently included in the items for the June 2022 meeting, this was not due to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee until 5 April 2022 where Members would be asked to approve the draft strategy for public consultation. The consultation responses would then go back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration; this was not likely to be until the meeting on 6 September 2022, therefore, it would not be taken to the Executive Committee for approval until 5 October 2022.
- 79.3 A Member noted that Action for Affordable Warmth 2013-18 had been removed from the Forward Plan as it was not a matter for the Executive Committee and he was interested to know how this would now be considered given that it was very topical. The Head of Community Services undertook to check and report back to Members following the meeting.
- 79.4 It was
RESOLVED That the Executive Committee Forward Plan be **NOTED**.

OS.80 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22

- 80.1 Attention was drawn to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme, circulated at Pages No. 16-19, which Members were asked to consider.
- 80.2 The Head of Corporate Services advised that the Update on Local Policing Arrangements, due to be considered at the meeting on 8 March 2022, would now be taken to the meeting on 7 June 2022 at the earliest as an Inspector had not yet been appointed for Tewkesbury Borough. In response to a query regarding the arrangements, the Chief Executive clarified that the normal rank for the Tewkesbury Borough Police Commander was Inspector; there was a Community Superintendent, who had just been promoted from Chief Inspector and had covered Tewkesbury Borough for a period, but there was currently no local commander in post. The Community Superintendent could be invited to give an update to the Committee but Officers considered it would be best to wait until an appointment had been made as that was expected in the near future.
- 80.3 A Member sought an update on the progress of the six month trial of mobile surveillance equipment for fly-tipping investigations, currently in the pending items section of the work programme. The Head of Community Services advised that the equipment was yet to be purchased due to some General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) issues which needed to be resolved. As Members would be aware, there had also been some changes to personnel within the Environmental Health team with the Interim Environmental Health Manager leaving the authority in December and the new Manager taking up his post; however, he provided assurance that, once the GDPR issues had been appropriately addressed and the equipment purchased, it would be deployed straight away with the six month trial commencing at that point.
- 80.4 The Head of Democratic Services explained that, at its annual meeting, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee appointed two Members to represent Tewkesbury Borough Council on the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee and the Gloucestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee; at the meeting in May 2021, Councillors John Murphy and Jill Smith had been appointed respectively. At that time, Members had been asked to nominate reserves to both Committees but nobody had come forward which meant there was nobody to deputise for either Member should they be unable to attend any meetings. Councillor Murphy was not able to go to the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee on 31 March and Councillor Berliner had kindly offered

to take on the role of reserve in order to represent Tewkesbury Borough Council at that meeting so the Committee was asked to formally approve the appointment. Councillor Berliner indicated that she was happy to take on the role of reserve for the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee and also the Gloucestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee should no other Member wish to put themselves forward.

80.5 It was proposed, seconded and

- RESOLVED**
1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2021/22 be **NOTED**.
 2. That Councillor K Berliner be appointed as the Council's reserve representative on the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee and the Gloucestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

OS.81 GLOUCESTERSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL UPDATE

81.1 Attention was drawn to the report from the Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel, circulated separately, which gave an update on matters discussed at the last meeting of the Panel held on 4 February 2022.

81.2 The Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel advised that the Police and Crime Commissioner had presented the budget – his first since he had come into office in May 2021. The meeting had been quite fractious as some Members had felt the proposals were not consistent with his manifesto. The Police and Crime Commissioner had indicated this was largely due to the need to address the outcomes of the recent review as a priority. The results – which had not been known at the time the Police and Crime Commissioner was campaigning – highlighted issues in terms of timescales and consistency in recording public reports of crime, as he had reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November. The conclusion for Gloucestershire was investment in additional resources for the recording of crime in order to meet the appropriate standards and achieve the 95% target within a certain period. The Police and Crime Commissioner remained committed to recruiting an additional 300 officers over the course of his tenure and the budget allowed for 58 officers, 76 staff and 87 special constables as well as 15 volunteer police community support officers who would be visible in the community and act as a deterrent. The Panel had the ability to reject the budget with a two thirds majority; however, following much debate, the Panel had unanimously approved the budget recognising the additional funds being put into the force based on the maximum precept uplift allowed without a referendum. It was noted that the money coming into the Police force would be a 50/50 split between central government funding and the £10 uplift in the precept. Gloucestershire had been slightly disadvantaged in terms of the allocation of certain funds, something which the Police and Crime Commissioner continued to lobby on.

81.3 At the last meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, a Member had queried whether the Police and Crime Commissioner was happy that lessons had been learnt from the performance of the force over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to be better prepared for future emergencies. The Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel had followed this up with the Police and Crime Commissioner and his staff and was advised that the Police had undertaken a review and prepared a 120 page document - based on extensive interviews and surveys with staff, partners and the public - which had captured the positives and negatives from how they had worked during the pandemic. A Consequences Management Group had been established to embed that learning.

The work had been shared with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary which had praised the document and response.

- 81.4 A Member noted there had recently been a drive to encourage members of the public to report anti-social behaviour to the police; however, feedback he had received from residents was that the incidents did not warrant a call to 999 but it was taking too long to get through to 111 and the online form was too complicated with too much personal information and detail required. He asked for these comments to be passed on to the Police and Crime Commissioner so that adequate resources could be put in place when appropriate. In response, the Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel indicated that he had completed the online form and agreed it was quite complicated so he would be happy to have a conversation with the Police and Crime Commissioner to find out whether it was something which was established centrally or if it could be amended. In terms of the speed of response, the Police and Crime Commissioner was aware that people were spending too long on the telephone and operational targets had been set for both 999 and 111 as current levels of performance were not acceptable. The Member went on to indicate that he had not seen any qualitative or quantitative targets so he asked how the Police and Crime Panel would be able to assess performance of the Police and Crime Commissioner if the targets were simply to 'reduce'. The Council's representative explained that the overarching goal was to make Gloucestershire a safer, more law-abiding county. There was a plethora of data available and the reporting pack produced by the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office captured all sources of information which was difficult to pin down to actual numbers. There would always be a qualitative nature to the targets as statistics could be misleading, for example, COVID-19 had distorted the figures as a lot of crime had reduced but there had been some particular crimes which had increased dramatically, for instance, bicycle theft. Notwithstanding this, the Council's representative was happy to report back to the Panel the need to continue to focus on reporting metrics in terms of performance. He pointed out that national data was available showing the performance of Gloucestershire compared to other forces and he stressed that it continued to be a safe and law-abiding county overall, albeit with particular issues such as rural crime.

- 81.5 The Chair thanked the Council's representative for his update and it was subsequently

RESOLVED That the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel update be **NOTED**.

OS.82 GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATE

- 82.1 Attention was drawn to the report from the Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee, circulated at Pages No. 20-21, which gave an update on matters considered at the meeting held on 19 January 2022.
- 82.2 The Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee advised that the meeting had focused on the Gloucestershire Infrastructure Investment Fund (GIIF) which provided gap funding to large private projects; usually a loan provider required an asset as security, however, there were some viable projects that did not have such an asset which was where the GIIF came in. Applicants needed to demonstrate that the project would not go ahead without such a loan. An overview of projects that had recently benefitted from the GIIF had been provided to the Committee and included the M5 southbound motorway services at Gloucester which had received £3m from the fund. This was a £40m project which currently employed 400 people, mainly from the local area. The services were regularly voted Britain's best and had become a destination in their own right whilst supporting significant growth in numerous local food and

produce businesses. The second item on the Agenda related to strategic planning in Gloucestershire and Tewkesbury Borough Council's Chief Executive had introduced a report compiled by Officers across the county which had been presented at the last meeting of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee and was intended as a reference point for Members. The strategic plan for Cheltenham Borough, Gloucester City and Tewkesbury Borough Councils was the Joint Core Strategy which was adopted in December 2017 covering the period 2011-2031 and had identified growth requirements for 35,175 homes, 192 hectares of employment land and 39,500 jobs. The Chief Executive indicated that, if any Members had a wider interest in the work going on around strategic planning outside of the borough and the Joint Core Strategy site, he would recommend looking at the link provided at Page No. 21 of the report which gave details of delivery of other plans around the county and major infrastructure delivery etc.

82.3 The Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee advised that the final item was the Executive Director's report which had prompted a lengthy discussion about the merits and demerits of the Community Infrastructure Levy compared to Section 106 Agreements in monetary terms. The Chief Executive explained that the Community Infrastructure Levy rates were set before the County Council had significantly increased requests for education funding. There had been discussion about the Community Infrastructure Levy not being particularly good, but it was noted that the three Joint Core Strategy authorities were working with the County Council to review the tariff and that work was being commissioned by the County Council; however, it was not possible to simply increase the tariff as there was a process of obtaining evidence to support any increase and gaining agreement across all Joint Core Strategy Councils before going out to consultation and a further examination in public. This was a statutory process which would take about a year and each of the plans across the county had different agreements in terms of what they charged for so this was not straightforward.

82.4 With regard to strategic planning, a Member asked if any information was available about what was being done by other local authorities bordering Tewkesbury Borough and projects which may benefit the borough. In response, the Chief Executive advised that the report did reference the Joint Core Strategy position in relation to Worcestershire; there was partnership working with the Worcestershire authorities which would be fed back via the Planning Policy Reference Panel which all Members were invited to attend. He recognised the Mitton scheme impacted upon the Joint Core Strategy, and Tewkesbury Borough in particular, and he would be happy to answer any questions Members may have on this matter.

82.5 It was

RESOLVED That the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee update be **NOTED**.

OS.83 GLOUCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2022/23 FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION

83.1 Attention was drawn to the report of the Head of Corporate Services, circulated at Pages No. 22-25, which asked Members to conduct the annual review of the effectiveness of the Council's involvement in the Gloucestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee in order to authorise payment of the Council's contribution to the running costs for the forthcoming year and to recommend to the Executive Committee that, subject to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee representative's continued monitoring and regular reporting to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, that the specific consideration of the payment of the sum on an annual basis no longer be required.

- 83.2 The Head of Corporate Services advised this was the annual report to the Committee seeking endorsement of the contribution of £2,500 towards the running costs of the Gloucestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee which allowed Tewkesbury Borough Council to have a representative on the Committee. Going forward, it was proposed that this report no longer be brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis as the contribution was for a minimal amount which was included in the base budget and the Council's representative would continue to attend meetings and report back to Members on a regular basis.
- 83.3 The Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee advised that all Gloucestershire authorities were represented on the Committee and none had indicated they intended to stop their contributions. She provided summary reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on matters discussed which included links to a wealth of more detailed reports which Members could read including performance reviews for different parts of the Trust. In addition, regular press releases and documents were circulated by email which were often relevant to all Members and shared accordingly via Democratic Services. In her opinion, representation on the Committee was needed and the contribution was value for money.
- 83.4 During the debate which ensued, a Member indicated that, whilst he was happy to support authorising payment for the forthcoming year, he was of the view that it was appropriate for this to continue to be done by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis. The Chief Executive explained that the Council had a representative on the Gloucestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and a reserve representative had been appointed by Members earlier in the meeting, so there was an expectation that those representatives would report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee if they felt it was not working as it should be, or if it no longer represented value for money, and the Committee could then decide whether to make further payments. The Council's representative provided both verbal and written reports so Members should be able to gauge from those whether Tewkesbury Borough Council's continued membership was beneficial. The Member expressed the view that it would be unfair to place this responsibility on the Council's representative and he felt that decision on the Council's finances should continue to be remain with the relevant Committee.
- 83.5 Another Member pointed out that £2,500 was a minor amount and he questioned the value of the Committee debating this on an annual basis, particularly as it was included in the base budget. The Council's representative indicated that her feedback would be the same whether the financial contribution was discussed annually by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or not and, although being the Council's representative was quite a commitment, she did feel it was valuable. The Head of Democratic Services clarified that if at any point the Overview and Scrutiny Committee did not feel it was getting value for money from having a representative on Gloucestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Members would have the opportunity to reconsider. The Chief Executive indicated that the £2,500 itself was relatively insignificant so the decision that needed to be made was in relation to whether attendance by the Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee was valuable in terms of what the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was getting – Members could make that assessment every time they received a report. Nevertheless, if Members preferred to receive an annual report then of course that could continue to be done. The Head of Democratic Services pointed out that, at the recent training session on effective scrutiny, Members in attendance had suggested that considering the annual report was not the best use of the Committee's time and, as the Chief Executive had said, Members should know if the Council was getting value for money on the basis of the reports received from the Council's representative.

83.6 Upon being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED

1. That Officers be authorised to make the payment of £2,500 from the Council's base budget.
2. That it be **RECOMMENDED TO THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE** that, subject to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee representative's continued monitoring and regular reporting to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the specific consideration of the payment of the sum on an annual basis no longer be required.

OS.84 DIGITAL APPROACH STRATEGY

- 84.1 The report of the Head of Corporate Services, circulated at Pages No. 26-35, attached the Council's Digital Approach Strategy. Members were asked to consider the proposed strategy and recommend to the Executive Committee that it be approved.
- 84.2 The Corporate Services Manager explained that the Council's previous Digital Strategy had done a brilliant job of identifying what the Council needed from a digital platform and that had informed the approach that needed to be taken to deliver an enormous amount over the course of the strategy. The Business Transformation team would be instrumental in its delivery and the lifetime of the document had been shortened to two years as the nature of the team's work was changing so regularly based on the demands and requirements of different services. The strategy would be reviewed every two years but the focus remained on savings, efficiencies and, most importantly, the delivery of services being shaped around the needs of customers. A 'digital by preference' ethos was being promoted as this would free up Officer time to deliver a service for those who were not able to engage with the Council online. Members were advised that, since the Business Transformation team went live in 2020, it had made a massive impact on the way services were being delivered and Page No. 33 of the strategy set out the key achievements. The digital priorities had been mapped out for the next two years, as set out at Page No. 34; whilst it was an ambitious programme, it was reviewed on a weekly basis and there were regular updates with the Lead Member and Management Team to ensure the pressures and demands on the team were being managed appropriately. The work of the Business Transformation team had been recognised nationally and the priorities identified for 2022-2024 would continue that – Officers had been contacted by other Councils interested to find out what the team was doing so this was an exciting time for Tewkesbury Borough Council and its digital journey.
- 84.3 A Member thanked the Corporate Services Manager for the report and welcomed the changes that the Business Transformation team had introduced across various services, particularly the successful bid for £150,000 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities funding for a planning application tracker and he asked whether that would be used on top of Liberty Create. In response, the Lead Digital Officer explained that the purpose of the funding was to provide an open source which was useable by other Councils so, whilst Liberty Create would not be specified, whatever was built would be useable by Liberty Create. The Member noted from the report that an IT and Digital Technical Board was due to be established in summer 2022 and he asked who would sit on the Board. In response, the Corporate Services Manager advised it would be headed by the IT Manager and would also comprise herself and a member of Management Team – likely to be the Head of Corporate Services; other services would be asked to join in as it was important to ensure Officers had management of the technology they were using. The Member went on to ask whether there was a strategy for the long-term storage of information to protect against system failure, security breaches etc. and he questioned how the data currently stored on Liberty Create would be accessed in

30 years time. The Lead Digital Officer explained that this was essentially covered by the processes in place for disaster recovery; if the system went down there was a chance that some data would be lost, however, the IT and Digital Technical Board would consider the risks and ensure that the right measures were in place during the build to ensure that data would be protected. In terms of the data in Liberty Create, this was always a standard format so there was no risk of being unable to extract that information once the contract came to an end.

- 84.4 A Member expressed the view that what3words– an app which worked by dividing the world into three metre squares and allocating each one a unique combination of three words so that locations could be found and shared easily - would be beneficial for Ubico and he asked if there were any plans to introduce this. The Lead Digital Officer confirmed that what3words was something Officers had been looking at and he could see no reason why it could not be introduced going forward. Another Member indicated that he would like to see residents provided with progress updates so when they reported something they knew what was being done and when. The Corporate Services Manager confirmed that this was certainly possible and the bulky waste service was a good example as customers could sign up for text or email updates. It was also something which was being considered as part of the planning performance tracker as the majority of enquiries received were from people asking for updates on their applications, so it was intended to push out texts or emails when applications reached a critical point.
- 84.5 A Member welcomed the Digital Approach Strategy and was pleased to hear it would still be possible for residents to speak to someone on the telephone if they did not have the capability to access services online. With regard to Page No. 27, Paragraph 1.3, a Member noted the success of the bulky waste service which had been achieved without a supporting marketing campaign and she asked if there were plans to promote the service going forward. The Corporate Services Manager confirmed that would be moving forward imminently and was expected to have a big impact – the success of the bulky waste service had been quite amazing with income having doubled compared to the previous year and Officers were keen to market the fact it was an online service in order to free up Customer Services to deal with customers who could not access it in that way.
- 84.6 A Member drew attention to the reasons for the recommendation, set out at Page No. 26 of the report, which stated that digital technology had the potential to transform Council services and the lives of residents whilst generating savings and reducing pressure on Council tax payers and he asked how this would be quantified. In response, the Corporate Services Manager explained that granular data could be extracted from the Engage software – a process mapping tool – to see the impact of every change that was made. The Head of Corporate Services confirmed that the outcomes would be: cashable savings e.g. moving the bulky waste service online had enabled some Customer Services staff to reduce their hours and those savings had been used by the Corporate Services team to make a temporary post permanent without the need for a growth bid; savings from building systems in-house e.g. £12,000 saved from building the procurement portal in-house as opposed to via Civica; efficiency savings e.g. creation of a credit card portal which would save time for the Finance team, although this was more difficult to quantify; and income generation e.g. income from the garden waste service had increased by £45,000 – these could all be pulled together to create a portfolio of case studies showing the cost benefits. The Chief Executive explained that the projects already delivered over the last 12 months had resulted in significant savings for the Council and had also made life much easier for customers. The Business Transformation team had done a fabulous job in taking the Council's digital services to where they were now and the Digital Approach Strategy would build upon that. Tewkesbury Borough Council was being held up across the country as a leader in terms of its digital projects and this was backed up across the services which had worked with the team to provide digital solutions – all staff had

been supportive and engaged to make improvements together and he hoped Members recognised what had been achieved.

- 84.7 The Chair noted that an awful lot of work had been done by a very small team and he questioned how the work outlined for the forthcoming two years would be prioritised. In response, the Corporate Team Manager explained that, for the first year, projects had been split into two halves – January-June 2022 and July-December 2022. The nature of the projects meant that Officers were able to work on more than one at the same time and resources were being used to fund a temporary post to bolster resilience within the team. She provided assurance that the priorities were regularly reviewed and the team was realistic about what could be achieved and would move things around if necessary. In response to a comment about succession planning, the Head of Corporate Services hoped that the Lead Digital Officer would continue in his role for the foreseeable future and a Digital Developer had been brought in 18 months earlier to support him; a Junior Digital Developer was being appointed on a temporary basis; and an apprentice had been taken on and would lead the land charges project – as such, he felt there was resilience within the team currently but there was likely to be a significant impact if any members of the team were lost. A Member queried whether there was scope to introduce champions within each service area who could carry out small tasks and the Lead Digital Officer felt it was a nice idea but it would be essential to have the right management and an understanding of how to connect things together; whilst there were probably people in each area that would be capable, it was not considered beneficial to pursue this at the current time. The Corporate Services Manager advised that other Councils using Liberty Create had taken that approach and had struggled – the Business Transformation team had very high expectations of itself and the services provided which may be jeopardised if rolled out to people without technical knowledge.
- 84.8 A Member expressed the view that the work being undertaken would have a real benefit for residents and he asked if there were plans to work with Parish Councils in future in order to offer a one-stop shop where information was all in one place. The Corporate Services Manager indicated that was the ideal scenario - currently, where possible, as online services were rolled out, residents were being redirected to the responsible authority if that was not Tewkesbury Borough Council. In response to a query in respect of the expansion of the room booking system and the potential to tap into the Local Enterprise Partnership etc. the Corporate Services Manager reiterated that nothing was impossible but capacity to deliver was the main restriction.
- 84.9 It was
- RESOLVED** That it be **RECOMMENDED TO THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE** that the proposed Digital Approach Strategy be **APPROVED**.

OS.85 HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2022-26

- 85.1 The report of the Housing Services Manager, circulated at Pages No. 36-65, attached at Appendix 1 the new Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2022-26. Members were asked to endorse the strategy prior to consideration by Executive Committee and Council.
- 85.2 The Head of Community Services explained that there were many different strands and priorities in relation to housing and it was important to have an overarching strategy which pulled this together and provided a framework for Officers to work within. Arc Consulting had been appointed to assist with development of the new strategy and a series of workshops had been held with partners and used to develop a draft document for public consultation. The previous Housing and Homelessness Strategy was a lengthy document containing a lot of detail and,

whilst it was important to have the background information as the priorities were based on evidence, it had been challenging to read. With that in mind, a different approach had been taken and the new strategy, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report, was clear, concise and something members of the public would be able to engage with. It was noted that the action plans which would ensure delivery of the strategy still needed to be developed by the Housing Services Manager and his team. The Housing Services Manager pointed out that, as well as being an accessible document, the strategy had been informed by Members and stakeholders – Officers had no preconceived ideas about what it would include and had been directed by those who would be using the strategy and would support the authority in meeting its aims.

- 85.3 A Member drew attention to Page No. 43 of the report which stated there were 1,814 housing register applications as at the end of September 2021 and he asked how many of those were rehoused. In response, the Housing Services Manager believed it was around 400 but he would need to check this following the meeting. With regard to Page No. 44, the Member noted that 11,700 new homes and 6,900 new affordable homes were required in the period 2021 to 2024 and he asked how it was intended to drive planning decisions in terms of the type of homes that were built. The Housing Services Manager explained that the Housing and Homelessness Strategy was not a policy document so, whilst it could highlight the direction of travel, the main opportunity to influence would be via the Joint Core Strategy review. The Chief Executive advised that affordable homes were provided in a variety of ways. In terms of housing need, this would be met through the planning policies in Joint Core Strategy 1 and Joint Core Strategy 2 – part of the review of Joint Core Strategy 2 would be to look at policies as they were developed. Affordable housing may be provided via exemption sites or directly by registered social landlords; there was a tendency to look at the figures and think they were all new housing providers but there were a number of factors to understand and it was more complex than simply looking at planning issues.
- 85.4 In response to a query as to the process for returning empty homes to occupation, the Head of Community Services advised that this was currently achieved via encouragement and speaking to landlords but there would be a project around bringing empty properties back into use which would be included within the action plan that was yet to be developed for delivery of the strategy. A Member asked if there was anything that could be done with regard to privately owned empty homes and was informed there were various incentives which could be offered. Tewkesbury Borough Council needed to develop its own policy around bringing empty homes back to use and that would be done as soon as resources allowed. A Member asked for the definition of an empty home and the Head of Community Services undertook to provide this following the meeting.
- 85.5 A Member noted that 9% of households were considered to be in fuel poverty and he assumed that would only increase going forward. The Head of Community Services indicated that, unfortunately, that was inevitable and Officers were working very closely with Severn Wye Energy Agency and Warm and Well to expand their schemes; he hoped to shortly bring a positive update to Members about the measures the Severn Wye Energy Agency was putting in place to support residents during this difficult time. The Housing Services Manager indicated that, given the priorities around carbon reduction and the benefits to tenants, Officers were working with housing authorities to ensure that properties were built to a high standard to begin with in order to avoid the need to retrofit – the Council's partners should be building to a higher standard than large volume developers.

- 85.6 A Member drew attention to Page No. 52 of the report and welcomed objective 3 - ensure the right accommodation and support is available for the survivors of domestic abuse – and objective 4 – identify and respond to the housing needs of vulnerable young people, particularly care leavers and those from rural areas – and he asked whether a care leavers covenant was something which could be considered going forward. The Head of Community Services confirmed that Officers were working with colleagues at Gloucestershire County Council to develop a care leavers covenant specifically for housing. The Chief Executive indicated that he sat on the County Council's Corporate Parenting Group and felt strongly that public bodies should give children in care, and care leavers, the best help possible.
- 85.7 A Member raised concern that there seemed to be a gap in support available to homeowners who struggled to afford to make improvements to their own homes but were ineligible for the grants available to those on a low income and he asked what could be done to address this. The Head of Community Services confirmed that Officers would be looking at the various schemes available. In response to a query regarding utilising land within Tewkesbury Borough Council's ownership for the provision of affordable housing, the Head of Community Services explained that the Council owned very little land and that which it did own was difficult to develop; however, land such as the MAFF site was taken into consideration when looking for opportunities.
- 85.8 A Member noted that the consultation on the draft strategy had run for six weeks and had been advertised on the Council's website and she asked whether this had been the right approach given that responses had been quite low. The Housing Services Manager confirmed that Parish Councils had been sent email reminders so attempts had been made to engage with key stakeholders. Another Member asked whether consultation events would have been held at public libraries etc. if COVID restrictions had not been a consideration and the Head of Community Services explained that, unless they had a specific interest in housing, it was unlikely that members of the public would want to comment on the strategy. The consultation had focused on specific interest groups and whilst comments had been received, not all had been relevant to the Housing and Homelessness Strategy specifically, for instance, comments in respect of climate change. The Corporate Services Manager agreed that, from a social media point of view, most followers would not engage with the consultation unless it was a problem for them so it was about addressing specific groups.
- 85.9 Several Members agreed that the strategy was a nicely written document which was easy to read and it was

RESOLVED That the Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2022-26 be **ENDORSED** prior to consideration by Executive Committee and Council.

OS.86 SEPARATE BUSINESS

- 86.1 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.

OS.87 SEPARATE MINUTES

87.1 The separate Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11 January 2022, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The meeting closed at 6:22 pm