

Minutes of the meeting of Council held at The Council Chamber - The Shire Hall, St. Peter's Square, Hereford, HR1 2HX on Friday 14 July 2017 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor DB Wilcox (Chairman)
Councillor PJ Edwards (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors: PA Andrews, BA Baker, WLS Bowen, TL Bowes, H Bramer, CR Butler, ACR Chappell, MJK Cooper, PE Crockett, PGH Cutter, BA Durkin, CA Gandy, DW Greenow, KS Guthrie, J Hardwick, EPJ Harvey, JA Hyde, TM James, AW Johnson, JF Johnson, JLV Kenyon, JG Lester, PP Marsh, RI Matthews, RL Mayo, MT McEvilly, PM Morgan, PD Newman OBE, FM Norman, CA North, RJ Phillips, AJW Powers, PD Price, P Rone, AR Round, A Seldon, NE Shaw, J Stone, D Summers, EJ Swinglehurst, LC Tawn, A Warmington and SD Williams

In attendance

Officers: Chris Baird, Annie Brookes, John Coleman, Geoff Hughes, Caroline Marshall, Alistair Neill, Martin Samuels and Claire Ward

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bartlett, Harlow, Holton, Lloyd-Hayes, Mansell, Michael and Skelton.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

14. MINUTES

An amendment to the minutes was discussed to include the additional wording, 'option D would be cost neutral whereas option B would place further burden on taxpayers whose council tax had just risen by 4% during April this year', under the summary of the debate relating to the councillors' allowances scheme at the previous meeting. There was division in the membership regarding whether the minute was accurate. It was agreed, by a simple majority, that the additional detail should not be added to the minutes.

In a correction to the minutes, it was noted that the table of elected chairmen and vice-chairmen to committees required amendment, as it was inaccurate, to include Councillor EJ Swinglehurst as the vice-chairmen for general scrutiny committee in place of Councillor CA Gandy.

RESOLVED: That, subject to the correction outlined above, the minutes of the meeting of 19 May 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15. CHAIRMAN AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Council noted the chairman and chief executive's announcements as printed in the agenda papers.

The chairman highlighted the following:

- The deputy lieutenant would address members at the end of the meeting in regard of the Honours system and the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service;
- The 200th anniversary of the Shire Hall; and
- The resignation of the Councillor Graham Powell from the council.

The chief executive highlighted the following:

- The budget consultation process currently in progress;
- Recent, good performance in hospital discharges enabled by available social care provision;
- The minute's silence for the victims of the Grenfell Tower disaster and safety and fire inspections that had been undertaken following requests from government.
- The opening of the EnviRecover waste processing plant.

16. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 7 - 8)

A copy of the public questions and written answers, together with supplementary questions asked at the meeting and answers, is attached to the Minutes at Appendix 1.

17. TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN 2016/17

Council considered a report which provided detail of the treasury management outturn for 2016/17. The cabinet member financial management and ICT introduced the report and explained that there had been compliance through the year with the treasury management strategy. The council had taken advantage of lower cost short term loans which had reduced the amount of interest payable during the year. The volatility in the Public Works Loan Board rates had allowed for the replacement of some short term loans with longer term arrangements, at a lower rate of interest payable. During the year the amount of interest received by the council was less than expected due to council maintaining a lower cash balance to reduce reliance on loans.

The comments of members and the responses provided are as follows:

- Concern was expressed regarding the current level of debt, the interest payable on that debt and the decreasing level of assets. It was commented that longer term plans were required to address the issue. *In response it was confirmed that the level of debt at the council was within statutory limits and the current medium term financial strategy had identified the disposal of assets up to 2019 to reduce the level of borrowing. The importance to the council's finances of identifying quality capital projects through the capital expenditure programme was also highlighted.*
- It was suggested that the proceeds of the sale of the tenanted farms should be allocated to developing student accommodation. *It was confirmed that projects were being developed to allow the council to realise good levels of return on investments and a commercial development partner would be appointed shortly to oversee this work.*
- A query was raised regarding the greater level of flexibility announced by government to allow local councils to undertake additional borrowing against capital assets. Further details regarding the implications of this initiative to Herefordshire Council were sought. *It was confirmed that the borrowing position of the council was under constant review. When proposals for capital investment were produced there was consideration of how to secure borrowing and at that stage an assessment of the implications to the council was undertaken. Greater*

flexibility around financing would be considered in a review of the treasury management strategy with any changes or formal proposals reported to Council.

- The concerns expressed by a local MP over the level of debt at the council in 2003 were raised. The significant increase in the level of debt since this time was noted and comment was invited from the cabinet member. *In response it was confirmed that the council had managed its borrowing within statutory and prudential limits.*
- The capital receipts generated during the year were questioned and further detail on those assets sold during the previous year was sought. It was also requested that detail of the percentage of the overall assets sold in 2016/17 be provided. *It was confirmed that detail would be sent to members.*

RESOLVED – that the treasury management outturn (at appendix one) for 2016/17 is approved.

18. LEADER'S REPORT

The Leader presented his report on the activities of Cabinet since the meeting of Council on 3 March 2017. Questions were invited to the Leader which included those issues raised below:

- The corporate parenting strategy was welcomed. The training provided to members regarding responsibility as corporate parents needed to be more effective than the online training previously provided. *The nature of the training would be discussed with officers.*
- Following Ofsted reports which highlighted the lack of supervision and support for front line staff would the training programme of adult social workers ensure consistent reporting and savings through more cost-effective work practices? *All work practice initiatives were aimed at ensuring more cost-effective arrangements and a significant recent improvement had seen an increase in the level permanent social workers compared to agency staff.*
- To support tourism and economic development in the county it was felt that the number of electric charging points for cars should be increased. Requiring all new homes to incorporate a charging point would contribute towards the council carbon management plan. *The projected increase in electric cars would necessitate a review of parking strategies and facilities for charging would be included in future policies of the council.*
- An issue regarding potential structural damage to ex-council houses was raised. It was understood that in some cases cladding had encased structural damage and prevented remedial repair. Problems securing home insurance had been experienced by some residents living in these houses. *The council no longer had social housing; the transfer to housing associations took place in 2002. A written reply would be provided to the issue raised.*
- The publication of six neighbourhood plans in the county since June ensured that those local parish councils were in a stronger legal and policy position to exercise control over development.
- Following the launch of the economic vision at Eastnor Castle the leader was questioned on what measures were in place to address the different opportunities for economic development in the market towns and the west of the county. *For the development of the county it was essential that the city attracted investment. The intention was for development and growth to be spread from the city to the market towns. To this end policies were being explored with the new university requiring students to locate and develop businesses in the market towns.*
- The external auditors had raised a concern regarding valuations on the council's properties and it was questioned whether this related to the small holding estate. *Valuations were subject to variance depending on methodology and current*

circumstances. Generally the bids that had been received were in excess of the valuations undertaken.

- The importance to economic development of tourism required acknowledgment in the annual performance report 2016/17 and assurance was sought that littering and fly-tipping would be addressed as part of initiatives to create vibrant town centres. *Work was ongoing to address littering including the introduction of gull-proof hessian refuse sacks to fast food restaurants and encouraging local cafes to reduce the size of disposable cups. It was explained that a funding bid had been made to access funds through the European Structural Infrastructure Fund for projects to extend the tourism season between October to March.*
- The level of support provided to carers was queried and if the council could do more. The role of a carers champion was raised. *It was confirmed that cabinet would be considering a carers strategy at its meeting on 20 July.*

RESOLVED: That the report is noted.

19. NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER STANDING ORDERS

The chairman confirmed that the notice of motion contained in the report attached to the agenda had been deferred, at the proposer's request, for consideration at the following meeting of the full council on 13 October 2017.

20. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (Pages 9 - 10)

A copy of the Member questions and written answers, together with supplementary questions asked at the meeting and the answers, is attached to the Minutes at Appendix 2.

21. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

In closing the meeting, the chairman reminded members that the next meeting is due to be held on 13 October 2017.

The meeting ended at 11.40 am

Chairman