

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE BOARD

26 JUNE 2023

UPDATE ON THE PROPOSAL TO RELOCATE REDDITCH LIBRARY

Summary

1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Communities, the Strategic Director for People and the Strategic Director for Commercial and Change have been invited to the meeting to update the Board on the progress of the Proposal to relocate Redditch Library.

Consideration of the Proposal

2. To date, the proposal to relocate Redditch Library has been considered by:
 - The Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board (OSPB) on 25 October 2022
 - Cabinet on 27 October 2022
 - Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 8 June 2023 (comments provided to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities are attached at Appendix 1)

Background

3. Redditch Borough Council have approached Worcestershire County Council to request that the Redditch Library Service is moved from its current location, into a new Community Hub at Redditch Town Hall, to free up the space for the development of Redditch Town Centre.
4. For Worcestershire County Council to be assured that the proposed move would not be detrimental to the library service or the County Council's interests, it has stipulated, as outlined in the Report to Cabinet on 27 October 2022, that specific Commercial, Operational and Collaboration requirements would need to be fulfilled. These requirements are considered essential in protecting the County Council's interests, and if met will ensure that the County Council will continue to fulfil its statutory responsibilities for Libraries and will be not financially worse off because of the relocation.
5. These requirements were stipulated in the preliminary discussions with Redditch Borough Council, which identified Redditch Town Hall as a potential alternative location to deliver the library service from. In summary, the proposed location within the Town Hall would be comparable with the space in the current library; be walking/pram pushing distance from the existing library and the suggested commercial arrangements would mean Worcestershire County Council was not financially worse off. With it being indicated that these requirements could be met, albeit more detail was required, Cabinet agreed at its meeting on 27 October 2022 to commence a formal public consultation to seek opinion and views on the proposed relocation, before making a final decision.

6. Redditch Borough Council is already working on the redevelopment of the Town Hall and plans to go ahead with refurbishments and extension regardless of the County Council's decision on whether the library will move there. Redditch Borough Council does this at its own risk. The Town Investment Plan states that government funding for the redevelopment of the library site is conditional on the library relocation. Tight timelines have meant that Redditch Borough Council have had to continue with planning activity ahead of the County Council's final decision on whether to approve the relocation of the library, in order for the funding deadline of 31 March 2026 to be met. The County Council has provided and funded significant project management expertise, to support the development of the project. Cabinet will consider the proposals and consultation entirely on its own merits in terms of the Council's statutory duties as a Library provider.
7. The timescales on the project are ambitious as the Towns Fund monies must be spent by March 2026. The library service move, should approval be given, is likely to take place in Autumn 2024.

Public Consultation – Activity and Promotion

8. A public consultation to understand residents' and library users' opinions, and the impact of a possible relocation of the library service in Redditch was carried out between 7 November 2022 and 24 February 2023.
9. The consultation consisted of background information to the proposals, a survey (available online and on paper), two public face-to-face meetings held at Redditch Library on 24 January 2023 and 9 February 2023 and a local history consultation meeting on 24 January 2023. The focus of the consultation was the proposed relocation of Redditch Library; it did not cover the wider Redditch town centre development proposals. A copy of the consultation activity plan, which sets out the full range of actions taken can be found within Appendix 2.
10. The online survey went live on 7 November 2022 until 24 February 2023 and was made available in Polish and Urdu. Alternative languages and formats could be requested by emailing the Redditch Library Consultation inbox referenced on the website and in press releases.
11. The paper survey was also available from the 7 November 2022 until 24 February 2023, and alternative languages and formats could be requested by emailing the Redditch Library Consultation inbox referenced on the website and in press releases. Paper surveys were also placed in the Redditch Library from the start of the consultation and were made available at the face-to-face meetings. A paper survey was also distributed to all Library Service at Home members at the start of the consultation via the Library Service at Home volunteers.
12. An email to all Redditch Library members (15,024 recipients) was circulated on the 7 November 2022 and then again on the 31 January 2023. The email promoted the consultation and provided the link to the Redditch Library Consultation site.
13. Paper visuals of the proposed library plans were placed in Redditch library on the 7 November 2022 for people to view. Additional images of the proposed interior were also provided and placed on the wall in the meeting room where the face-to-face

meetings took place. Simple versions of the Floor Plans were provided, following feedback, approximately two weeks later.

14. The proposed library plans were also placed on the Redditch Borough Council website along with further information about the proposed Plaza. The Redditch Library consultation site provided a link to the Redditch Borough Council webpage where more information could be found.
15. The Worcestershire County Council social media campaign for the consultation ran from 27 October 2022 to 22 February 2023. The social media posts are listed within the consultation plan in Appendix 2, but the overall performance of these posts are as follows:
 - Impressions (the number of times a post has been viewed; this could be multiple times from one person) - during this period: 20,828
 - Engagements (the number of times someone has 'liked,' commented, or shared a post) – during this period: 499
 - Clicks (the number of times the link in a post has been clicked) - during this period: 376
16. Worcestershire County Council also released proactive press on the dates below and copy of these releases can be found in Appendix 2 - the Consultation Activity Plan
 - 7 November 2022 – Making people aware that the consultation had launched
 - 11 January 2023 – Making people aware of the face-to-face meetings
 - 3 February 2023 – Making people aware of the face-to-face meeting
 - 15 February 2023 – Making people aware that the consultation would be closing soon.
17. Worcestershire County Council press releases were picked up by various newspapers including the Redditch Advertiser and Redditch Standard (all Consultation coverage can be found in Appendix 2 - the Consultation Activity Plan).
18. On average, the Redditch Advertiser has approximately 298,500 page views per month, and the Redditch Standard has 380,000 page views per month.
19. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) were placed on the Redditch Library Consultation site and were updated regularly based on queries and feedback. These FAQs were also provided to library staff to help prepare them for the consultation launch. Team leaders and staff were given a briefing note alongside the FAQs, to help provide support on how they should respond to queries from members of the public, about the consultation. On 12 December 2022, library staff also had a Q&A session to raise any further questions or queries they had received following the consultation launch.
20. In addition to the activity outlined above, digital posters were placed in local bus stops from 11 November 2022 until 24 February 2023. Digital posters and physical posters were also placed in the library following feedback provided at the face-to-face consultation meetings.
21. Facebook groups, for example “Hands off Redditch Library” also promoted and shared the County Council’s social media posts about the consultation.

22. Worcestershire County Council's Customer Services and Relations team were briefed at the start of the consultation, to direct any enquiries that came in via telephone to the Redditch Library Consultation inbox.
23. Full anonymised responses to the survey were published on 07 June 2023 and are available to view here: [Redditch Library Consultation | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Public Consultation – Summary of Findings

24. The independent analysis of the consultation was carried out by Worcestershire County Council's Business Intelligence Team and completed based on the data available, including feedback from all sources. This report can be found in Appendix 3.
25. There were a total of 1467 responses to the survey (including 97 paper surveys). This represents 2.2% of the Redditch population aged over 19. There was good engagement and response to the survey for people aged 30 or over. There were fewer responses received for younger people aged under 30. 81% of survey respondents said they were library members.
26. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the new location for Redditch library being the Town Hall. 72.3% of respondents said that they disagree to some extent.
27. Library members were more likely to disagree (77%) with the plans than non-library members (51%).
28. Respondents were asked to give the reasons they agreed or disagreed with the new location for the library. 1425 comments were received. Feedback fell into two broad categories:
 - Factors relating to the proposed new location for the library
 - Factors relating to the wider town centre proposals
29. The three most common themes given by respondents in relation to the proposed new location for the library were:
 - **The proposed location for the new library is not as good**
Comments about it being further from the town centre, bus stops, railway station and car parks were cited
 - **Concern that there will be a reduction in the facilities offered by the new location**
Concerns that the move might lead to a degradation of library facilities and services and comments that the information provided at the consultation stage is not sufficient to reassure them that facilities will not be lost.

This theme included concerns about the relocation of some archive collections to Worcester and about meeting room provision.
 - **Concern that the relocation will result in a reduction in the size of the new library**
Concerns that the new location would result in a reduction in the size of the

library, having an impact on how respondents use the building to read, relax, work, or attend with children.

30. Other common themes around why respondents disagree with the Town Hall as an appropriate location for the library included:
- Concern the new location would lead to a fall in library use
 - Concern the new building might be less accessible, e.g., steps, steep ramps etc.
 - Safety of the area around the Town Hall and on the approaches to it.
31. There were several common themes as to why respondents agree that the Town Hall would be an appropriate location for the library:
- The new location is only a very short distance away
 - It is an effective use of buildings
 - They are happy to have the library as part of a hub with services all in one place
 - The idea that a move to a new location could include new, modern facilities
 - The new location could be more accessible
32. Respondents were asked whether anything would prevent them from using the library in the new location at the Town Hall. 1204 people responded to this question. The most common response to this question, by 36% of respondents, was that nothing would prevent them from using the library in the new location.
33. Reasons given that might prevent use of the library if it were in the Town Hall included:
- The environment or feeling of the new building
 - Would not use out of principle or boycott
 - Reduced facilities of the new building (if local archives were removed)
 - Availability of parking nearby
34. Two public meetings were held as part of the consultation giving residents the opportunity to ask questions and express concerns to a panel with officer and member representatives from Redditch Borough Council and Worcestershire County Council. Just over 100 people attended these meetings.
35. Many similar themes were dealt with in the public meetings as were expressed in the survey comments such as not wanting the library to move, how it would be a waste of money and the suitability of the Town Hall as a location for the library service.

Public Consultation – Responses to concerns raised

36. In response to the key themes raised through the consultation, work has begun to address some of the concerns.
37. Discussions have taken place with Redditch Borough Council to identify ways of addressing accessibility concerns including making improvements to the Redditch Shop Mobility service and Dial a Ride service, mapping shortest and most accessible routes to the proposed new library location from different car parks, bus stops and other locations around the town centre, highlighting covered walkways and including a Blue Badge car parking space at the Town Hall. For example, the nearest bus stop

to the Town Hall is on Ipsley Street, a walking distance of 95m, compared to 153m from Redditch Library to the current nearest bus stop on Church Green West.

38. To address safety concerns Redditch Borough Council have confirmed that new LED lighting is being added to existing lamps within the Town Centre as a part of Public Realm enhancements, along with provision of new lighting along the High Street.
39. During the public consultation, a commitment was made by Worcestershire County Council to collaborate with local history groups and archive volunteers on the development of a plan for Redditch Library archive collections that would ensure archive material with the highest levels of local interest and demand was retained locally. This collaborative work commenced on 30 March 2023 and a draft plan has been completed and will be shared with local history partners the week commencing 19 June 2023. Working with plans recently provided by Redditch Borough Council we will be able to carry out a more detailed assessment of the amount of archive material that can be accommodated at the Town Hall if the relocation goes ahead.

Progress against the County Council's Stipulated Requirements

40. The Cabinet report of 27 October 2022 set out several requirements to protect the County Council's interests, both commercially and in terms of service offer / statutory responsibilities. Progress to date against these requirements and the assurance offered in how they can be met are outlined below.

Commercial Arrangements

41. The following explains how the "same cost" and best value for disposal requirements are met:
 - a. The existing library (including accommodation leased to third parties) consists of approx. 1764sqm. The previously reported 637sqm in the 27 October Cabinet report included high level areas reviewed in initial feasibility stages. Further work has been completed in the last 6 months to confirm the size of all areas within the current library building, including areas leased to a tenant, shared areas, back-office space, display space and study areas. The existing spaces within Redditch Library are identified in the below table, and have been verified by Worcestershire County Council Property Services:

Table 1: Existing Library Provision Space breakdown (sqm)

Identified Library Area	Total Area (sqm)
Dedicated Library	
Main Library Area	380
Children's Area	92
Computer Area	28
Multimedia Area	25
Meeting Room	19
Non-Fiction	147
Meeting Room 2	55
Meeting Room 3	28
Library Staff Desks Back of House (shared)	12
Book Store (archive / basement storage)	200
Office / Crafts Room	33
TOTAL	1019
Dedicated Tenant	
Front of House incl. Interview Room	325
PACE	9
Meeting / Training Room	25
Back of House Office (shared)	107
TOTAL	466
Shared Areas (areas owned by WCC and shared with Library Tenant)	
Entrance & Lobby	22
Library Shared Area with Tenant (computer area)	117
Staff Shared Room with Tenant	43
Shared Mezzanine with Wall Displays	69
Server Room	15
Shared meeting room	13
TOTAL	279
<u>Redditch Library Total Area</u>	<u>1764</u>

- b. Taken from the area schedule provided by Redditch Borough Council on the 15 June 2023, the area proposed to be leased to Worcestershire County Council within the Redditch Community Hub will provide 1835sqm, therefore providing an equivalent, albeit slightly larger, area. Based on these floor areas, an open market value of the accommodation to be leased to Worcestershire County Council has been assessed to be of similar open market value to the existing library. An updated set of floor plans and area schedule was received on the 15 June 2023 (attached at Appendix 4). At the time of publication of this report these plans had not been 'signed off' as

acceptable as due diligence was required, although slight changes will not impact overall valuation.

- c. Worcestershire County Council will be granted a 125-year lease of the accommodation for the library at the Redditch Community Hub and have proposed that this comes with the ability to sublet the whole or part, or to assign the lease in its entirety, subject to approval of both parties, not to be unreasonably withheld. At the end of the lease the County Council or its successors will have the rights to be granted another lease.
- d. In return for Redditch Borough Council granting a lease to the Hub, Worcestershire County Council will grant a 125-year lease of the Redditch library land and building. The County Council will retain the freehold at all times. Permission will be granted under the lease to allow Redditch Borough Council to redevelop the site, including the demolition of the library building itself. Upon expiry (or mutually agreed termination) of the lease to Redditch Borough Council, the land and any assets situated on it will revert to the County Council's ownership. In relation to both Head Leases neither the County Council or Redditch Borough Council can dispose of the Freehold, Assign or Sub-Let the Leasehold interests without the other party's agreement. To safeguard the total value of assets and ensure the County Council is no worse off financially at any stage, the Council will also be seeking to introduce terms to protect it should the total value of the assets be lower (in real terms) than it is today upon expiry of the lease. Terms will be included within the lease to offset any potential loss based on any difference. If, as expected, the total value is more than today's market value of the site (including assets), this will be accounted as a benefit to the Council.
- e. Worcestershire County Council currently receive an income from letting space within the existing library plus a proportional contribution to the running costs. If the County Council moves services to Redditch Town Hall, Redditch Borough Council will lease equivalent space to Worcestershire County Council to provide for the library and its current tenant. The County Council would then lease equivalent accommodation to its tenant and therefore still receive similar rental income which is guaranteed until 2028 when the lease ends. Conversations are ongoing with Worcestershire County Council's tenant on their occupancy of the proposed new space, noting the County Council's right within the existing lease to relocate them.
- f. Worcestershire County Council has proposed a mechanism within the heads of terms for the lease of the accommodation within the Redditch Community Hub, which will protect it from increased net premises costs which would not otherwise be incurred. It is proposed that the total of service charge must not be more than budgeted for the existing library for equivalent services, and this figure will rise annually on an appropriate price index but will never be more than the actual proportional costs. The County Council will have direct responsibility for electric charges as these will be separately metered to reflect actual use which we will have control of. The fact that the Town Hall building has new windows, solar panels and an air source heat pump installed is expected to support reducing running costs. Net budget position for Redditch library was included in the Cabinet report of 27 October 2022, and further detailed budget information has been shared with Redditch Borough Council. Redditch Borough Council confirmed in writing on 07 June

that ongoing running costs for the County Council's area within the Town Hall would be in line with actual spend in 2022/23. An outline of updated service charges is expected from Redditch Borough Council.

- g. Subject to satisfactory agreement being reached on the implementation/relocation costs as per the below, and providing an agreement can be reached in line with the principles above that the net costs to the County Council are equivalent to current net costs at the existing library in respect of both the capital assets, ongoing running costs, and income generate, in aggregate, the requirement for the County Council's overall costs/income position to be no worse will be met.
- h. Worcestershire County Council are waiting for Redditch Borough Council to confirm the proposed heads of terms and to provide an indication of what the actual likely proportional costs will be and the detail on the services to be covered under this cost. At the time of writing this has yet to be received from Redditch Borough Council.
- i. Redditch Borough Council provided a cost plan in August 2022 outlining the overall project funding to be provided for building works including fixtures and fittings. Since October 2022, further detailed planning has taken place to build the detailed scope of the requirements for internal and external plans, including a specific focus on Information Technology set up requirements. The provision that Redditch Borough Council will fund all costs associated with the relocation and the detail of specific works covered will be included in the contract to enter into a lease between Redditch Borough Council and Worcestershire County Council once the heads of terms have been agreed across all parties. The contract will make it conditional that these works are completed before the County Council are bound to complete the agreement to take the lease of the accommodation at The Hub and to lease the Redditch library to Redditch Borough Council. The principle of a 'no worse' position for Worcestershire County Council financially and operationally has been agreed with Redditch Borough Council. An updated cost plan incorporating all further developments such as IT set up costs, installation of CCTV provision, fit out of the areas is yet to be provided, and has been delayed by further amendments to layout plans.
- j. Worcestershire County Council have provided a detailed furniture audit of the current library and an assessment of which specific items of furniture can transfer to the proposed new location, reducing fixtures and fittings costs. However, until the floor plans for service delivery areas are finalised, it is not possible to confirm which items of furniture can be transferred. It will be a requirement that Redditch Borough Council will cover the costs of any new furniture required directly because of the move, for example, where wall space is limited in the new design, existing wall mounted shelving cannot be re-used, and new freestanding items will need to be procured. Written confirmation from Redditch Borough Council on this principle is being sought for inclusion in the Heads of Terms. Worcestershire County Council have committed to funding any items of furniture which will require replacement or upgrade for service delivery reasons.
- k. Should the request to move library services be approved, further support requirements from Worcestershire County Council are yet to be costed

including ongoing project management and other support services such as IT, Property and Library Services. WCC resources from a range of service areas have been allocated to Redditch Borough Council's project for the last 12 months at no cost to Redditch Borough Council. Ongoing support cannot be confirmed until Worcestershire County Council have received an updated project plan outlining the requirements and timeline.

- I. Further meetings to discuss Heads of Terms for lease agreement with Redditch Borough Council, noting all the above points and items yet to be confirmed, were held on 5 and 12 June 2023. Discussions to finalise in line with the County Council's requirements continue

Operational and Service Conditions

42. Worcestershire County Council confirmed in March 2023 that the sqm calculations for the current library space were accurate, as noted in table 1 above and used for comparison to space in the proposed new area. An updated area schedule (square metre calculations) for the Library Space in the Redditch Community Hub was received on 15 June 2023 along with high level floor plans. A further iteration of floor plans is being worked on to confirm furniture layout following feedback received from the library service. Table 2 outlines the latest totals – though it should be noted that these are still subject to change when due diligence has been carried out on floor plans.

Table 2: Space Comparisons (sqm) existing and proposed Redditch Hub for Library and Library Tenant including service delivery space and back-office space. Note this is still subject to change following due diligence.

Space Allocated to:	Current Library	Proposed Library space in Community Hub	Difference
Library front of house (dedicated, public facing, service delivery)	1019	1094	+75
Tenant dedicated provision	466	518	+52
Shared space between library and tenant	279	223	-56
Total	1764	1835	+71

43. As mentioned in paragraph 41b) above, Worcestershire County Council have received updated floorplans from Redditch Borough Council on 15 June 2023, they indicate how the space and shared space are allocated across the lower ground, ground and first floors of the Town Hall. These updated plans are required to enable finalisation of commercial arrangements outlined above, and to assure Worcestershire County Council that allocated space within the Town Hall is equivalent to the service delivery area of the current library building. There are more detailed floor plans also being developed, which will include all the necessary furniture (e.g., shelves and computer desks) required to deliver the library service. These are expected by the 22 June 2023 and if received will be made available ahead of Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board on the 26 June 2023. It should again be noted that County Council Officers will require time to review this information and undertake due diligence therefore at the time of publication of this report no firm statement can be made on the assurance that the proposed space is acceptable for the library service.

44. Worcestershire County Council requires that alternative premises for the library are in a location that retains current footfall levels or where mitigation of a less central location is provided through an increase in the number of co-located service providers. The Community Hub at the Town Hall provides a single building for a range of agencies, including NHS and Redditch Borough Council services (confirmed) and other services (yet unconfirmed). However, it has been confirmed by Redditch Borough Council that NHS space and services will only be accessible by a separate entrance to the Town Hall. Separate entrances at the Town Hall for co-located partners may discourage use of library services and reduce library footfall. A review of methods for measuring footfall may be required to ensure data post-move can be directly compared if entrances are separated.
45. Redditch Borough Council have verbally committed to inclusion of a Blue Badge parking space in the Town Hall car park for library customers, in addition to short stay pick up and drop off spaces. This would enable customers with blue badges to park directly outside the library in its new location. The current Redditch Library building does not have allocated Blue Badge parking spaces. Worcestershire County Council have requested written confirmation from Redditch Borough Council that accessible and short stay spaces will be available for library users in the Town Hall car park. Further accessibility concerns raised through public consultation are noted in the Consultation section above and are also addressed through the Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment completed for the Cabinet Report due for consideration in July 2023 (Appendix 5).
46. All plans reviewed by Worcestershire County Council to date show the library service arranged predominantly on the ground and first floors of the Town Hall, with archive and storage space on the lower ground floor. The proposed extension to the Town Hall to accommodate the Community Hub includes a new 2 storey glass entrance and rear glass 4 floor extension, with highly visible signage and increased glazing throughout. Appendix 6 details the Latest exterior imaging of Redditch Community Hub – fly through video which contains artists impressions of the vision and ambition for all Redditch Regeneration Projects. Planning permission for these external works has been submitted to Redditch Borough Council and is currently live on the Public Planning Portal for comment. The proposed plans provide assurance that the requirement for a high profile, visible, glazed entrance to provide an attractive ‘shop window’ from the street can be met, subject to planning application approval.
47. Redditch Borough Council have confirmed that the Libraries Unlocked service delivery model can be implemented when a decision is made on the timeline for Redditch. The cost of implementing Libraries Unlocked will be covered by Worcestershire County Council as a part of that programme budget. Confirmation on a timeline for implementation of Libraries Unlocked in Redditch is subject to the Cabinet Decision on Redditch Library.

Collaboration Opportunities

48. Redditch Borough Council have provided verbal assurance that Worcestershire County Council’s requirement for the design of the public realm space to incorporate clear design links and directional links to the proposed new library site to promote visibility of the library and mitigate risk of reduced footfall is being addressed. The County Council are awaiting confirmation from Redditch Borough Council on this matter. It is noted that the proposed location is close to the proposed Innovation Centre development. Worcestershire County Council has requested additional

signage, way marking and other features to be included in the Public Realm developments to encourage footfall to the new location.

Purpose of the Meeting

49. The Panel is asked to:

- consider and comment on the contents of the report
- agree any comments to highlight to the Cabinet Member; and
- determine whether any further information or scrutiny is required.

Supporting Information

- Appendix 1 - Comments provided to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities from the meeting of Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 8 June 2023
- Appendix 2 - Consultation Activity Plan
- Appendix 3 - Redditch Consultation Analysis Report
 - Appendix 3A Redditch Library Consultation Survey
 - Appendix 3B Redditch Library Consultation Supplementary Questions
- Appendix 4 - Floor Plans
- Appendix 5 - Equality and Public Health Full Impact Assessment (prepared for Cabinet Decision on 20 July 2023)
- Appendix 6 - Latest exterior imaging of Redditch Community Hub – fly through video containing artists impressions of the vision and ambition for all Redditch Regeneration Projects. Link to video: [Regeneration projects | Redditch Town Deal](#)

Contact Points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- [Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board on Tuesday, 25th October, 2022, 2.00 pm - Worcestershire County Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)
- [Agenda for Cabinet on Thursday, 27th October, 2022, 10.00 am - Worcestershire County Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)
- [Agenda for Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on Thursday, 8th June, 2023, 10.00 am - Worcestershire County Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.