

Executive Committee

29th July 2014

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Bill Hartnett (Chair), Councillor Greg Chance (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Brandon Clayton, Mark Shurmer, Debbie Taylor and Yvonne Smith

Also Present:

Councillor Pat Witherspoon, Mr Roger Hill and Mr Ken Williams

Officers:

Emma Baker, Jess Bayley, Emma Cartwright, Kevin Dicks, Tracey Durrant, Stacey Green, Sue Hanley, Jayne Pickering, Sarah Sellers and Alexa Williams

Committee Services Officer:

Ivor Westmore

15. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Juliet Brunner and John Fisher.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

17. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader advised that the agenda would be taken out of order in view of the attendance of Mr Ken Williams from the Town Centre Partnership and also that the minute extract from the most recent meeting of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee contained within the Additional Papers 2 pack should be read in conjunction with the report relating to item 5 on the agenda (Voluntary Sector Task Group – Final Report) for this evening's meeting.

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Chair

18. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 24th June 2014 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

19. VOLUNTARY SECTOR TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT

The Committee received the final report of the Voluntary Sector Task Group, the outcome of the review being presented to it by Councillor Pat Witherspoon, Chair of the Group, and former Councillor Roger Hill.

Members were informed that the key objective of the review had been to assess the Council's grants process and ensure that it was a robust, transparent process that was fair to all recipients. As a consequence of the review the Group had developed ten overall recommendations which covered the broad scope of the grants process, the Council's relationship with the voluntary sector and volunteering more generally.

Among the more significant recommendations were proposals that the timescales for the Council's grants process be amended to enable voluntary sector organisations to plan constructively for the year ahead, that the geographical spread of the client base be taken into account in scoring applications, that the Framework Agreement for the Provision of Debt and Budgeting Advice to be delivered within the Locality areas in Redditch should be supported by the Council for the foreseeable future and that the Council should build upon the work it carried out in engaging with and bringing together voluntary sector organisations.

The Executive Committee thanked the Group for a good report and expressed its support for the recommendations that it contained. A number of minor amendments were agreed during consideration of these recommendations, as follows. Given the corporate nature of the apprenticeship budget and the desire to retain an equitable situation for all service areas it was agreed that recommendation 4 be qualified to avoid committing this funding to one particular post. In respect of recommendation 8 it was agreed that this suggestion be taken forward as part of the wider staff awards ceremony. Despite there being widespread Member and Officer support for recommendation 9, the resource implications of implementation led the Committee to agree only to consider the introduction of a Redditch Hour on social networking sites in conjunction with local businesses and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations within the Borough.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the following should be addressed in relation to the Council's grants programme:**
 - a) the timescales for the Council's grants process should be reviewed to ensure that decisions are made in sufficient time to enable Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to plan constructively for the year ahead;**
 - b) the geographical spread of the client base for Voluntary and Community Sector organisations should be taken into account by the Grants Panel as part of the scoring process when considering applications for grants;**
 - c) the template for the Council's application form for Council grants should be reviewed;**
 - d) action points should be recorded at meetings of the Council's Grants Panel;**

- 2) the following actions should be taken in respect of the members of the Grants Panel:**
 - a) formal training should be provided to Members of the Grants Panel;**
 - b) wherever possible members of the Grants Panel should visit Voluntary and Community Sector organisations that have been awarded larger project grants as part of the monitoring process. These visits should take place before the second instalment of funding is provided to the organisations;**

- 3) the implications of the Local Government Transparency Code 2014 should be considered by Officers to ensure that the Council's grants process is amended as and when required. Officers should ensure that any changes that are made to the process in response to these requirements take account of local needs;**

- 4) the Council should consider employing an apprentice to support the work of the Grants Officer. Consideration should be given to sharing this apprentice with a Voluntary and Community Sector organisation;**

- 5) the *Framework Agreement for the Provision of Debt and Budgeting Advice to be Delivered Within the Locality areas in Redditch* should continue to be supported by the Council for the foreseeable future;**

- 6) an informal working group of Council Officers should be formed to discuss and share knowledge about current joint working with Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. These informal meetings would also provide an opportunity for different teams to identify further opportunities to work with Voluntary and Community Sector organisations and highlight any duplication of work;
 - a) dedicated space should be introduced on the Council's intranet to allow Officers working with Voluntary and Community Sector organisations and / or volunteers to share information;
- 7) the following actions should be taken in relation to the Staff Volunteering Policy:
 - a) the policy should be refreshed and promoted;
 - b) a taster list of local volunteering opportunities should be advertised on the "Briefcase" section of the Council's intranet for the consideration of staff. In particular, consideration should be given to advertising volunteering opportunities that would help to address the Council's strategic purposes;
- 8) a Staff Award should be created to recognise the voluntary work carried out by members of staff and incorporated within the existing Staff Awards Ceremony;
- 9) the Council should consider working in conjunction with local businesses and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to introduce a "Redditch Hour" on twitter and other social networks;
- 10) A Voluntary Sector Event should be held on a regular basis to help promote
 - a) the work of local Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to each other as well as potential customers;
 - b) volunteering opportunities to local residents; and
 - c) a prize giving awards ceremony should form part of this event.

This event could potentially be aligned to existing events that are already take place.

20. CONSOLIDATED REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUTTURN

Members considered the consolidated revenue and capital outturn position for the preceding financial year and the Financial Reserves Statement for the same period. It was reported that Officers had provided considerably more detail within this report than had previously been the case, detailing the budget positions and variances across the various service areas in turn. It was acknowledged that there was still some work to be carried out in appropriately apportioning recharges between services but the present report did provide a clear and comprehensive picture of the situation at the year end.

Officers were able to report that the £550K of unidentified savings for the year had been found and, indeed, greater savings had been achieved which had resulted in the Council transferring money back into balances, a situation that had not been envisaged at the start of the year. Officers had also detailed the current levels of reserves and explained that the Council had approximately £2M currently in reserves once the reserves for dilapidations to Threadneedle House and those for Mercury Emissions works at the Crematorium were drawn down and the NNDR reserves discounted.

The Committee was generally pleased to see that savings had been achieved although there was a recognition that the funding situation was not liable to improve in the near future and difficult times were set to continue. Following some discussion around the continued underspend on the Disabled Facilities Grant budget, Officers undertook to ask the team to review their budget requirements, although there was a reluctance to propose reducing the budget given the nature of the service. In relation to a specific enquiry, Officers undertook to request that the Head of Environmental Services contact Councillor Brandon Clayton to confirm the current situation with the Estate Enhancements programme and its associated funding.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the current financial position on Revenue and Capital be noted, as detailed in the report;**

and RECOMMENDED that

- 2) the transfer of £165K into balances be approved;**
- 3) the carrying forward £3.2M for Capital project schemes be approved;**

- 4) **the movement in reserves as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report be approved; and**
- 5) **an increase in the 2014/15 Capital Programme to include the following Section 106 funded project: £16,500 for Pitcheroak Golf Course for improvements to the greens and creation of a par 3 course to encourage juniors and beginners to play golf, be approved.**

21. CHANGES IN FUNDING FOR EXTRA CARE SCHEME

Members considered a report setting out proposals to increase existing service charges relating to communal facilities at St. David's House and Queen's Cottages and asking that they note that, in future, costs for providing housing-related personal support would be borne by individual tenants.

Officers explained that the Council was having to make these changes in response to cuts to funding from Worcestershire County Council as part of its Future Lives programme, although there was a recognition that the County Council was itself under serious financial pressure. The Committee was informed that Officers' primary aim in developing the current proposals was to maintain services to vulnerable tenants whilst ensuring that tenants were not placed under undue financial strain.

Tenants of the properties concerned and their families had been briefed in detail on the implications of what was being proposed and Officers and Members who had been present were pleased to be able to report that there was a high level of understanding and support for the measures that were being recommended. It was noted that the Council was attempting to provide this service on a break-even basis and that a number of self-funding tenants would be better off as a result of the changes. There was also a recognition that, historically, certain charges had been set at an unrealistically low level and the proposals would remedy this situation.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **service charges for the cost of providing communal facilities at St. David's House and Queen's Cottages be increased to reflect the actual cost of providing them;**
- 2) **charges to apply from Monday 6th October 2014 and to be reviewed on an annual basis as part of the Council's fees and charges process; and**

RESOLVED that

- 3) **it be noted that, in future all residents of St. David's House and Queen's Cottages will be charged for housing related personal support, which is currently paid for some residents by the Worcestershire County Council Supporting People Fund, as this is being withdrawn.**

22. RESPONSE TO STRATFORD UPON AVON'S PROPOSED SUBMISSION CORE STRATEGY

Officers presented the Committee with a response to Stratford-on-Avon District Council's Proposed Submission Core Strategy for retrospective approval. The approval was retrospective in light of the consultation period commencing on 5th June and closing on 17th July 2014.

It was reported that the Strategy had received a generally supportive response. The one matter which Officers highlighted was the change of approach with regards to land within Stratford and whether it has any potential future capacity for housing for Stratford.

Officers undertook to provide Councillor Brandon Clayton with details of the date upon which the Stratford Core Strategy would be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate.

RECOMMENDED that

the response to the Stratford on Avon Proposed Submission Core Strategy be approved retrospectively.

23. COVERED MARKET AREA - PROPOSAL FOR PLAY BARN

Mr Ken Williams, Chair of the Town Centre Partnership, attended the meeting in order to present to the Committee a proposal for a play barn scheme in the redundant covered market area in Redditch town centre. The decision which Members were being asked to consider was the leasing of the land in question to the Town Centre Partnership for this purpose at no cost.

There was a general acknowledgement that the site in question required improvement and no other viable use of the site had been put forward in recent years. Furthermore, the space had a number of facilities which made it ideal for this purpose. The site was secure, covered and yet open-air, well-located and had toilet facilities in close proximity. This scheme was seen as a fitting 50th anniversary legacy project.

The proposal envisaged two children's areas, one for younger and one for older children, and a free to use adult exercise space. Funding was to be found through sponsorship, corporate funding and community funding and a limit of six-months had been set within which the necessary funding was to be delivered. The scheme also envisaged there being no liability to the Council.

Members very much welcomed the proposed scheme. It was made clear, in response to specific questions, that this land did not form a part of the sale of Threadneedle House, nor had it been identified as a parking area for that property. In addition, Officers reported that the Planning Team had advised that, in principle, the use of the site as a play area was acceptable in planning terms but that a lease of no more than ten years would be appropriate so as not to prejudice any future development strategies.

RESOLVED that

- 1) in principle the land known as the covered market area, outlined in the site map at Appendix 1 to the report, be leased, for a peppercorn rent, to the Redditch Town Centre Partnership for the purpose of the scheme to create a play barn, subject to the planning and funding requirements of the scheme being secured, within 6 months of agreement;**
- 2) the Executive Director for Finance and Resources and Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services, be delegated authority to be satisfied that the necessary planning permission and funding for the scheme have been secured by the Redditch Town Centre Partnership and to prepare and execute a Lease of the land to the Redditch Town Centre Partnership for a term and on conditions, which will secure the Council's interests whilst supporting the venture in so far as it is compatible with them; and**
- 3) the Redditch Town Centre Partnership be asked to provide regular updates to the Leader and relevant Portfolio Holder on progress.**

24. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17th June 2014.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17th June 2014 be received and noted.

25. WORCESTERSHIRE SHARED SERVICES JOINT COMMITTEE

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting of the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee held on 26th June 2014 and considered a recommendation contained therein.

Officers explained that the recommendation was in response to funding changes for the service which resulted in a need to review the cost model as originally set out.

Worcestershire Regulatory Services - Business Model Review

RECOMMENDED that

the changes to the Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership Agreement as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report submitted be approved.

26. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

The update on the activity of the Council's Advisory Panels and similar bodies was considered by the Committee. Councillor Greg Chance, Chair of the Economic Advisory Panel, reported that he and Officers were looking to establish a new form of this body which would incorporate local businesses and would also report to the Redditch Local Strategic Partnership.

It was reported that there were upcoming meetings of the Grants Panel which were not included in the report, the first of which was to be held on 6th August 2014.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

27. ACTION MONITORING

The Committee's Action Monitoring Report was considered by Members. It was reported that the actions listed within the report had now been carried out.

Executive Committee

29th July 2014

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.48 pm

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Chair