

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 11 July 2017

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Bill Hartnett (Chair), Councillor Greg Chance (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Joe Baker (during Minute No.'s 20 to 34), Debbie Chance, Brandon Clayton, John Fisher, Mark Shurmer and Pat Witherspoon

Also Present:

Councillor Michael Chalk (observing)

Officers:

Ruth Bamford, Matthew Bough, Clare Flanagan, John Godwin, Sue Hanley, Jayne Pickering, Amanda Singleton, Liz Tompkin and Chris Wells

Democratic Services Officer:

Debbie Parker-Jones

18. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Juliet Brunner.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

20. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Former Borough Councillor and Mayor Jack Cookson

Councillor Hartnett spoke of the sad death at the weekend of former Borough Councillor and Mayor Jack Cookson, following a short illness. The Leader paid tribute to Mr Cookson who was described as "a real character and man of the people" and who would be sadly missed by everyone who had known him. Councillors passed on their condolences to Mr Cookson's wife Sandra and sons John-Paul and Adam, whom Councillor Hartnett had unsuccessfully tried to contact since hearing the news. A minute's silence was held and

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Chair

the Town Hall flag was being lowered to half mast as a sign of respect to Mr Cookson.

Additional Papers

Two sets of Additional Papers had been circulated in advance of the meeting, which comprised:

- a minute extract from the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee held on 4th July 2017 in relation to the Council Housing Allocations Policy 2017 (following a referral from a meeting of the Homelessness Short, Sharp Review group also held on 4th July) – which was to be considered at Agenda Item 9; and
- the confidential minutes of the meeting of the Shared Services Board held on 6th July 2017 in relation to the Shared Planning Policy and Conservation Service Business Case – which were to be considered at Agenda Item 17.

It was also noted that the 4th July O&S Committee had not put forward any alternative recommendations in relation to the Strategic Intervention Update report at Agenda Item 7, and had resolved to note this.

Work Programme

The following reports which were due to be considered, or possibly considered, at the meeting had been deferred to a later date:

- Service Delivery Options – HRA Gas Maintenance;
- Whistleblowing Policy;
- Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules; and
- Reddicard Review.

The Planning Fees report had been removed from the Executive Work Programme as Officers were currently awaiting confirmation from the Government as to possible new legislation in this regard.

21. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD ON 6TH JUNE 2017

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 6th June 2017 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

22. SATURDAY MORNING OPENING ARRANGEMENTS

Members considered a report which sought approval for the Town Hall to cease opening on the first Saturday morning of each month, for cashiering and basic enquiries, following a reduction in the weekly Saturday morning opening hours in September 2016.

It was noted that since reducing the opening hours there had been a gradual reduction in customers coming into the Town Hall on the first Saturday of each month. The busiest Saturday of the year – 1st April 2017 – had also seen a 33% reduction in customer numbers compared with 2nd April 2016. Whilst complete closure on Saturday mornings would not result in any further saving to the Customer Services budget, the move would help to ensure that the Council could maintain appropriate staff resources during the week, when demand was substantially higher.

Although one Member expressed concern at the proposal, both Members and Officers confirmed that no adverse comments had been received from the public in this regard. Data which had been gathered by Officers also showed that there had been a decrease overall in cash and card payments and an increase in internet and automated payment line payments, with no barriers, other than personal preference, having been identified for people moving to alternative payment methods.

RESOLVED that

the Town Hall cease to open on Saturday mornings for cashiering and basic enquiries with effect from September 2017.

23. WRITE OFFS APRIL 2016 TO MARCH 2017

The Committee received a report on the write off of unrecoverable debts for the 2016/17 financial year.

Members noted the bad debts provision detailed in the report. Whilst £597k of unrecoverable debt had been written off during 2016/17, compared with £452k in 2015/16, the value of write off remained well within existing bad debts provisions. The Challenges presented by the introduction of a new finance system had meant there was no write off of sundry debts during 2015/16. However, once it had been possible to review the accounts Officers had established where write off was appropriate, meaning there had been a higher value of sundry debts written off during 2016/17. Members noted that the value of Aged Debt in the Sundry Debts system as at 31st March 2017 was £562,025, compared with a total debt recovered of over £10.3m.

In relation to the levels of bad debts provisions detailed in paragraph 3.1 of the report, Officers advised that the levels were set in conjunction with the Council's External Auditors and were based on established Aged Debt profiles. As such, it was not easy to compare the Council's write off data with other local authorities. Officers stated, however, that wherever possible they always looked to recover debts, with write offs being a last resort. Officers added that it would not be possible to claim back Housing Benefits Overpayments once Universal Credit had been rolled out, which would result in increased write offs in this area in the future.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

24. STRATEGIC INTERVENTION UPDATE

Members received a report which updated them on the Strategic Intervention work that had been undertaken within Cultural and Leisure Services in relation to the Council's 'Provide good things for me to see, do and visit' strategic purpose, and which set out proposals for the next steps with this. As detailed under Leader's Announcements, it was noted that the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee had, on 4th July, received a detailed presentation from Officers on this work and the report before Members. Following consideration of this O&S had opted to note the contents of the report and presentation, and had not forwarded any alternative recommendations for the Executive Committee's consideration.

Officers presented the report and highlighted the three options detailed for delivery of Leisure and Cultural Services across the Borough, namely:

- Continued In-House Management and Delivery;
- Creation of In-House Trust/Company (a 'Teckal'); or
- Outsourcing to the Market.

Whilst Officers had carried out a large amount of work over the preceding 18 months in identifying and delivering ways to reduce costs of the leisure provision, further work was needed prior to any final decisions being made by Members. Officers advised that one of the key gaps in information related to what the public wanted and needed facilities-wise, and what would work best for the local community. Further work was to be undertaken in relation to the Palace Theatre and the Council's Reddicard/concessions policy, with partnership working also needing to be looked into. It was proposed that a final options report be presented to the Executive

Committee on 31st October 2017, which would also identify any funding shortfalls and options for meeting any financial gaps.

Members were pleased to note that all options detailed in the report would be fully explored prior to any final decisions being made, with the future viability of any options being of paramount importance. It was also noted that the funding which had previously been set aside by the Council to facilitate this work would cover any costs involved with this.

Following consideration of the update report it was

RESOLVED that Officers:

- 1) **undertake survey work with residents to understand why members of the community do not use the Council's facilities and identify services that would encourage more use;**
- 2) **undertake a feasibility study of the Palace Theatre to establish the cost benefit of altering the venue to provide more seating and improved access to the Box Office, this to include the benefits of retaining VAT on the cultural income;**
- 3) **undertake a review of the Council's Reddicard/concessions policy to ensure this best meets the needs of the vulnerable members of the community;**
- 4) **undertake soft market testing with external providers to understand future provision with reference to community activities and influence;**
- 5) **provide a detailed external feasibility study of the options available for both in-house company and external market appraisal; and**
- 6) **present an options report back to the Executive Committee on 31st October 2017 to include a comprehensive appraisal on each of the three options; maintain in-house provision, establish an in-house delivery model or outsource to an external company.**

**25. REDDITCH SPORTS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY STRATEGY
2017/2022**

The Committee were presented with the draft Sports and Physical Activity Strategy 2017/2022 ('the Strategy').

Members noted that the Strategy was influenced by two of the Council's strategic purposes, namely: 'Provide good things for me to see, do and visit' and 'Help me to live my life independently'.

The Strategy would provide a high level strategic vision for the provision of sport and physical activity in Redditch over the next 5 years, and would be used as a tool by both the Council and external organisations to identify physical activity, health and wellbeing priorities for the town and decreasing health inequalities. This would, in turn: provide for a more cohesive approach in gaining desired outcomes for Redditch; promote partnership working; and help reduce duplication of work and the sharing of joint resources.

Members supported the Strategy and in doing so noted the various physical activities which were currently being carried out by other organisations within the town.

RESOLVED that

the Redditch Sports and Physical Activity Strategy 2017/2022 be approved.

26. COUNCIL HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY 2017

Members were asked to consider an updated version of the Council Housing Allocations Policy ('the Policy'), which had been updated to include legislative changes and new methods of working in relation to the allocation of social housing since the 2009 Policy was last updated in 2012. Members also considered the minute extract of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 4th July 2017, which included a recommendation from the Homelessness Short, Sharp Review group supporting adoption of the Policy.

Officers explained the changes to the Policy and advised that the trial introduction of the 'direct matching' of properties to applicants approach had resulted in a decrease of 80% in the number of first offers of properties which were refused. This success had come about as a result of collaborative working by the Locality and Housing Options Teams, which had led to a clearer understanding of housing needs and preferences.

Officers advised that the Policy was currently out to consultation, with the deadline for responses being 19th July. Two responses had been received to date, with details of all responses received to be presented to Members at Council on 24th July.

RECOMMENDED that

subject to consultation responses, the revised Housing Allocations Policy 2017 be adopted.

27. ANTI-FRAUD AND CORRUPTION POLICY

The Committee was presented with an updated Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy ('the Policy').

Officers highlighted the importance of the Policy, which provided a robust framework to ensure processes were in place to identify and prevent fraud and corruption across the Council to protect public safety and public money. Officers confirmed that the Policy had not been updated for 4 years and that the Policy before Members would be biennial, covering the period 2017/2019, which would be confirmed in the Policy.

A Member queried what changes had been included in the updated Policy. Officers advised that they understood these to be mainly legislative changes, which they undertook to check and advise Members on outside of the meeting.

RECOMMENDED that

the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy be approved.

28. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 1ST JUNE 2017

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 1st June 2017.

It was noted that there were no recommendations to consider.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 1st June 2017 be received and noted.

29. MINUTES / REFERRALS - TO RECEIVE AND CONSIDER ANY OUTSTANDING MINUTES OR REFERRALS FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, EXECUTIVE PANELS ETC.

[Minute Extract of 4th July 2017 Overview and Scrutiny Committee](#)

A minute extract and recommendation arising from the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 4th July 2017

(circulated as Additional Papers 1) were considered along with Agenda Item 9 – Council Housing Allocations Policy 2017 (Minute No.26 refers).

30. CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD - VERBAL UPDATE FROM PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY AND REGULATORY SERVICES (IF APPLICABLE)

Councillor Baker advised that the Corporate Parenting Board had noted that Redditch Borough Council was the only council which had retained its housing stock, and that registered social landlords needed to understand the housing requirements for young people.

RESOLVED that

the update be noted.

31. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

Members noted the report and that the meeting of the Member Support Steering Group which had been scheduled to take place the previous evening had been cancelled at short notice owing to lack of Member availability. Councillor Fisher advised that he would be liaising with the Democratic Services Team on a new date for the meeting as soon as possible.

RESOLVED that

the report/position be noted.

32. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that

under S.100 I of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following matters on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12 (A) of the said Act, as amended:

- (i) Item 16 – Minutes of the meeting of the Shared Services Board held on 6th July 2017 (private meeting – relating to Item 17); and**
- (ii) Item 17 – Shared Planning Policy and Conservation Service Business Case.**

33. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES / REFERRALS - MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SHARED SERVICES BOARD HELD ON 6TH JULY 2017

The Committee received the confidential minutes of the meeting of the Shared Services Board held on 6th July 2017. These were considered under confidential Agenda Item 17; Shared Planning Policy and Conservation Service Business Case.

34. SHARED PLANNING POLICY AND CONSERVATION SERVICE BUSINESS CASE

The Committee received a confidential report on the Business Case for a proposed shared Planning Policy Service, which included in-house conservation advice between Redditch Borough Council and Bromsgrove District Council. Members also considered the confidential minutes of the meeting of the Shared Services Board held on 6th July 2017, which included a minor proposed amendment to the recommendation detailed in the report.

Officers provided an overview of the principles behind the Business Case and proposed structure, which followed implementation of the new Development Management Shared Service on 1st July. Officers went on to explain the staffing implications of the proposed structure and changes to the current conservation function within both Councils.

Members supported the proposed Business Case and the recommendation amendment proposed by the Shared Services Board.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the Shared Service Business Case for Planning Policy, including Conservation advice, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved;**
- 2) the new Planning Policy Service be charged to both Councils on the percentage share as defined by the 2016/17 budget allocations:
 - a) Bromsgrove 60%;**
 - b) Redditch 40%;**
(with 2)a) and 2)b) to be reviewed in 12 months' time after the introduction of the shared service); and
 - c) the financial split for the Conservation element be 75% Bromsgrove District Council and 25% Redditch Borough Council, to reflect the greater number of listed building and conservation areas within the****

administrative area of Bromsgrove District Council;
and

- 3) the Service be hosted by Bromsgrove District Council due to the larger geographical area, complexity of planning issues and the higher number of Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.45 pm

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Chair