

Executive Committee

18th December 2012

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Bill Hartnett (Chair), Councillor Greg Chance (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Rebecca Blake, Michael Braley, Carole Gandy, Phil Mould, Mark Shurmer and Debbie Taylor

Also Present:

Councillors Andrew Brazier and Andy Fry

Officers:

D Allen, R Bamford, M Bough, R Cooke, K Dicks, S Garratt, S Hanley, T Kristunas, J Knott and C Flanagan

Committee Services Officer:

I Westmore

107. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Luke Stephens.

108. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

109. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader informed the Committee of two recent, sad losses. It was reported that former Councillor and Mayor of the Borough Mrs Joan Tyers had died during the preceding week. Members were also formally notified of the sudden and unexpected death of Mrs Denise Sunman, Democratic Services Officer a week and a half previously. The meeting observed a minute's silence as a mark of respect to Mrs Tyers and Mrs Sunman.

The Leader advised that the following item of business, scheduled on the Executive Committee Work Programme to be considered at

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Chair

this evening's meeting, has been rescheduled to a later meeting of the Committee:

- Council Tax Support Scheme.

The Leader also advised that he had accepted the following matters as Urgent Business:

- Item 9 – Kickstart Scheme; and
- Item 13 – Matchborough East Community Centre Transfer

as they had not been not on the Committee Work Programme for this evening's meeting.

110. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee meeting held on 20th November 2012 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

111. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2013/14 - 2015/16

Officers reported that the final settlement for the 2012/14 financial year from central Government was expected to be communicated to the Council the following day, 19th December, and that a 5% reduction in grant was anticipated.

The Council was continuing to make efforts to close the funding gap in the current financial year. Savings were being achieved through Transformation, the redesign of certain services and through driving out any residual 'waste' in service provision more generally.

112. GAMBLING ACT 2005 - REVIEW OF STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

The Committee received a report advising of the outcome of the recent consultation exercise undertaken with stakeholders in relation to the 2012-2016 Statement of Gambling Principles. It was noted that one response had been received following the formal consultation period and Officers reported that the Council's Licensing Committee had endorsed the Statement as printed.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the outcome of the consultation exercise and the views of the Council's Licensing Committee be noted; and**

RECOMMENDED that

- 2) **the 2012-2016 Statement of Gambling Principles be adopted from 31st January 2013.**

113. TENANCY STRATEGY 2012 - 2014

The Committee was informed that the authority was required under the Localism Act 2011 to prepare and publish a Tenancy Strategy by 15th January 2013. It was reported that a Tenancy Policy for the Borough would follow in due course. The Strategy set out the major considerations to which registered providers of social housing within the Borough were to have regard in formulating their tenancy policies.

Members broadly welcomed the report, whilst recognising that demand for social housing in the Borough and elsewhere significantly exceeded supply. It was hoped that the introduction of non-secure tenancies might provide some scope for more efficient use of the social housing stock in Redditch. Members were keen that communities should continue to be sustainable and did not wish to see a move towards transient populations and there was an expectation that the Council's forthcoming Policy would mitigate against this. In this regard, there was an acceptance that the model for tenure that had existed for a number of decades was changing across the country, not least because of the present financial situation.

RESOLVED that

the Tenancy Strategy, at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

114. WORCESTERSHIRE HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

The Council was required to have a Homelessness Strategy in accordance with the Homelessness Act 2002. The draft Countywide Strategy before Members had been created by a Project Team of Officers from across Worcestershire.

The Strategy had been produced during a period of great change, largely as a consequence of the prevailing economic conditions, and it considered how austerity measures might adversely impact on homelessness and the measures that were needed to mitigate the impact of these. The Committee was pleased to note that the Council had been singled out at various points within the report as an example of best practice within the County group.

There was considerable discussion around the relative provision of temporary accommodation within the different Districts of Worcestershire and surrounding areas and instances of families or individuals from outside the Borough being housed in Redditch accommodation. Officers explained that the Borough had the lowest homeless acceptance rates in the County as a result of the proactive steps taken by Officers to prevent homelessness. There were occasions, however, when Redditch accepted homeless people from outside the Borough in exceptional circumstances and this arrangement was reciprocated across the County and further afield. Officers were in the process of developing a Protocol with other Local Authorities to address this issue and offered to circulate it to members of the Committee following the meeting.

RESOLVED that

the Draft Countywide Joint Homelessness Strategy and action plan attached at Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

115. KICKSTART SCHEME

Members received a report informing them of the closure of the national Kickstart Programme and proposing that the Council take on the management of the existing Kickstart loans made to residents in Redditch. Officers explained that it had taken some considerable time for the scheme to become embedded in the Borough, to the extent that only four loans had been made prior to the closure of the scheme. The Council was in line to receive up to £78,000 in due course as a result of the repayment of these loans, and the income would be returned to the General Fund.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the winding up of the Kickstart scheme be noted and the loans granted to RBC residents (as set out in the Deed of Assignment attached at Appendix 1 to the report) be re-assigned to the Council so that it can deal with enquiries from borrowers, and manage those loans in the future; and**
- 2) authority be delegated to the Head of Legal Services to enter into the Deed of Assignment on behalf of the Council.**

116. TOWN CENTRE LANDSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS

The Committee considered a report which provided information on potential landscape improvements that could be undertaken within the Town Centre.

Members were informed that there were five areas that were being considered for improvement and that the area in question on this occasion was the northern edge of Church Green. The bandstand and the fountain were to remain in situ but the work was intended to make the area more attractive, accessible and usable. Capital money had already been set aside to carry out this work. Amended recommendations were tabled which included proposals for a further, final period of consultation on the plans for this part of Church Green.

Members welcomed the proposals and noted the reasons for the additional consultation. It was explained that this consultation would take place in the New Year.

RESOLVED that

the proposed spend of a proportion of the agreed budget and the intended timescales for the phasing of the project be endorsed, subject to;

- i) a 4 week consultation period being undertaken with regard to the Bandstand element of the project (such consultation to make it clear that the Bandstand will remain in current location); and**
- ii) the results of the consultation being discussed with the appropriate Portfolio Holder and Ward Councillors and, if significant, reported back to the Executive Committee.**

117. STREET NAMING AND NUMBERING - REVIEW OF POLICY

The Executive Committee's approval was sought to a small revision to the existing policy on Street Naming and Numbering in Redditch and to the addition of a new street name to be added to the official list.

Members were informed that the revision to the Policy was a result of the previous item on the Town Centre landscape Improvements and related to changed specifications for the Street Name Plates in the Town Centre.

The addition to the official list was in memory of a young engineer who had unfortunately lost his life during construction of a development within Redditch.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the revised policy on Street Naming and Numbering, as attached to the report at Appendices 1 and 2, be approved and adopted; and**
- 2) **'Handford', a young man who was killed during construction of a development within the Redditch area, be added to the list of potential street names.**

118. POLICY FOR LEASES OF COUNCIL LAND AND PROPERTY AT A CONCESSIONARY RENT

A report was considered which detailed a draft policy for the granting of rent relief / concessionary rents to voluntary sector organisations.

The new draft Policy aimed to deal with the lack of consistency which had been applied in the past, owing to there being no criteria against which to judge individual applications for rent relief. In addition, it sought to establish a link between the granting of concessionary rents and the grants process. By so doing, the voluntary sector would have a clearer idea at the outset of how much they might be expected to pay in rent for any Council-owned premises. There was to be a three-year transitional period and a proposed maximum concession of 70 % on the market rent. At present the Council provided in excess of £100,000 in rent relief but this was not reflected in the Council's accounts; the new system would provide much greater transparency

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had established a small Task Group to consider the matter but it had been unable to access the final version of the draft Policy until following the preparation of its report. As a result, its recommendations were not able to address a number of the points in the draft Policy. Given these problems, it was agreed that the Portfolio Holder should give these recommendations further consideration following the meeting, although the Committee did not feel it appropriate to adopt them

Members were keen to have the Grants Panel take responsibility for this matter. There was some discussion as to the proposed length of leases under the new Policy and it was agreed that the wording of the final Policy document be amended to clarify that the three-year period referred to within the report was the period for the granting of a concessionary rent and not for the lease itself. There was also considerable debate over the provision of a final appeal process to the Executive Committee by organisations who did not consider that the maximum 70% concession would allow them to remain viable. It was agreed that it be made clear that organisations

would need to fulfil all the criteria for gaining a 70% discount and that this provision was merely to allow some flexibility to deal with very exceptional cases.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Draft Policy attached at Appendix 1 to the report be approved, subject to the wording being amended in line with the comments of the Executive Committee, and implemented with immediate effect for new tenancies;**
- 2) **transitional arrangements be introduced with effect from 1st April 2013 to allow the policy to be fully implemented over a three year period taking into account the terms of existing leases;**
- 3) **authority be delegated to the Head of Finance and Resources in conjunction with the Council's Voluntary Sector Grants Co-ordinator to approve concessionary rents/rent relief in line with the draft policy attached at Appendix 1 to the report; and**
- 4) **the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management consider the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and determine whether aspects of its recommendations might be incorporated into the Policy in due course.**

119. MATCHBOROUGH EAST COMMUNITY CENTRE TRANSFER

Officers provided an explanation of the background to this item, explaining that the Matchborough East Community Centre had been declared surplus to requirements in 2009 but had not subsequently been disposed of as the new Shared Service had considered that there were possibilities for making use of the premises.

The Council had subsequently been approached by a Community Interest Company, Your Ideas, to ascertain if the Community Centre would be available for lease. The organisation currently occupied a shop unit at Matchborough Centre.

Redditch Community Amateur Boxing Club had expressed an interest in taking up the potentially vacant unit currently occupied by Your Ideas and an adjacent vacant unit in order to retain grant funding which they had obtained from the Inspired Facilities Fund through Sport England. There were time constraints in that the Boxing Club needed to secure a premises by the end of March 2013 or it would lose its grant funding.

Members were pleased to support the recommended course of action as they recognised the good work that was carried out by both Your Ideas and the Boxing Club. In addition, this proposal would lead to the Council making significant savings.

There was concern at the prospects of the existing users of the Community Centre finding alternative provision, but assurances were given that Officers were making considerable efforts to ensure that a satisfactory outcome might be achieved for all parties. There was, in any event, an acknowledgement that the Council would not be in a position to replace the existing soft play facilities once they had reached the end of their life in around one year's time.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **Property Services be instructed to assist Leisure and Cultural Services to transfer the MECC to Your Ideas on a Full Repairing Lease basis for a period of seven years; and**
- 2) **Property Services be instructed to work with Redditch Community Amateur Boxing Club to explore a lease option for the shop unit vacated as a result of 1), above, on a Full Internal Repairing Lease basis for a minimum period of seven years.**

120. QUARTERLY SICKNESS MONITORING - QUARTER 2 - JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2012

The Committee considered the latest quarterly report setting out performance in relation to sickness absence.

It was reported that performance was improving over time and active steps were being adopted to improve the situation further. The Employee Assistance Programme was in place and the Council was in the process of employing a Well-being Officer.

The most significant cause of sickness absence was stress, depression and related conditions although Officers reported that there was only one work-related case of stress contained within these figures, with other cases being primarily the result of external factors such as bereavement.

RESOLVED that

the data relating to the quarter be noted.

121. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 6th November 2012.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 6th November 2012 be noted.

122. WORCESTERSHIRE SHARED SERVICES JOINT COMMITTEE

The Committee received the minutes arising from the most recent meeting of the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee held on 22nd November 2012 be noted.

123. MINUTES / REFERRALS - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, EXECUTIVE PANELS ETC.

There were no minutes or referrals to consider under this item.

124. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

The Committee received the most recent report on the activity of the Council's Advisory panels and similar bodies.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

125. ACTION MONITORING

The Committee received the latest Action Monitoring report.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.