

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 12 March 2013

MINUTES

Present:

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

Also Present:

Councillors Andrew Brazier, Alan Mason, Brenda Quinney and Derek Taylor and Ms Ros Sidaway (Director, Redditch Town Centre Partnership)

Officers:

E Baker, R Bamford, M Craggs, C Flanagan, D Hancox, S Hanley, C John, T Kristunas, B Talbot and A de Warr

Committee Services Officer:

I Westmore

162. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

163. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

164. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader advised that the following items of business had not originally been scheduled to be considered at this meeting of the Committee:

- Item 6 – Redditch Growth and Local Plan No.4 Public Consultation; and
- Item 9 – Local Welfare Assistance.

165. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

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Chair

the minutes of the meetings of the Executive Committee held on 12th and 18th February 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

166. REDDITCH MARKET TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT

The Committee received the final report of the Redditch Market Task Group and members of that Group, Councillors Andrew Brazier, Alan Mason, Brenda Quinney and Derek Taylor, attended, along with Ros Sidaway, the Director of Redditch Town Centre Partnership, to present their findings.

The background to the review was a perception that the market was in a gradual decline with a steady decrease in the numbers of traders and the range of goods available. The Group had travelled around the region to see what was working well elsewhere and what might be successfully adopted in Redditch. Consultation had also been undertaken with traders, customers and the public more generally and, as a consequence, the Group had come to a number of conclusions.

It was asserted that markets could succeed if they were of sufficient quality but they needed to offer a wide selection of quality goods that weren't readily available elsewhere and additional attractions such as entertainment and catering. It was also suggested that they might provide an opportunity for the promotion of local businesses, groups and causes and for the development of entrepreneurial and retail skills amongst young people or those seeking employment. More specific recommendations focussed on such matters as the adverse impact on the market of charity street fundraisers and means of mitigating their effect.

Members welcomed the report and commended the Group for their effort and enthusiasm. There was broad agreement with the thrust of the recommendations, that a new strategy should be adopted and a means put in place for taking these recommendations forward. A number of quick wins were identified amongst the recommendations but it was suggested that the Group might have considered more bold and radical options. It was accepted that the Council might not be the most suitable party to effect these changes and it was proposed that all options be considered to secure the future success of the market. In lieu of establishing a working group as recommended by the Task Group it was instead suggested that the Portfolio Holder take these proposals forward in the first instance with Officers to establish at the outset the most effective delivery method for a viable and vibrant market.

RESOLVED that, subject to the Portfolio Holder taking the lead on working on the detail of proposals and on the adoption of a bold and radical approach to recommendations 1 and 2 in particular, including a full assessment of the options for delivering a vibrant and viable market,

- 1) a new strategy for the market be developed which clearly sets out how the market can be revitalised over the next five year period;**
- 2) a small core working group consisting of local stakeholders should be created to help develop and implement the new strategy.**
- 3) the number of general retail market operating days should be reduced to no more than three days a week. The working group to consult with existing regular traders about which particular days should be retained;**
- 4) consideration is given to holding more speciality markets to take place on non general retail market operating days on a regular basis to help create a niche for the Redditch market. The working group to consider how such markets would be managed within the available resources;**
- 5) the market working group considers the feasibility of introducing an on-site Redditch Market information point;**

Chapter 2 – Operational Issues

- 6) the market working group considers the feasibility of market customers being provided with an opportunity to pay the traders for goods through their mobile phone and debit and credit card payment facilities;**
- 7) each trader is required to possess a returns policy which should be clearly advertised;**

Chapter 3 – Engaging with the Local Community

- 8) the working group facilitates further opportunities for local people, especially students and the unemployed, to obtain business experience through operating stalls in the market place at no charge on a short-term basis, to include the introduction of a new mentoring scheme to offer help and assistance to new traders;**

- 9) the working group facilitates further opportunities for local businesses to showcase their goods and services on market stalls;
- 10) the working group facilitates the allocation of free stalls on a rotating basis to local people to promote forthcoming community events and the work of local charities, subject to stall availability;

Chapter 4 – Areas for further investigation

- 11) the market working group explores the possibility of realigning and extending the layout of the market past its current location;
- 12) the market working group explores the feasibility of introducing a covered food court area;
- 13) the market working group explores the suitability of the design of the current market stalls and to consider whether the introduction of alternative stalls would improve the overall visual appearance of the stalls;
- 14) the market working group ensures that any review of signage in the town centre includes adequate reference to the market;
- 15) the market working group works with local bus operators to help further promote the market;

Chapter 5 - Other

- 16) the Council should engage with the Public Fundraising Regulatory Association with a view to reaching an agreement to regulate the working days and areas of charity street fundraisers in Redditch Town Centre; and
- 17) Redditch Borough Council should join the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA) and participate in the *Love Your Local Market 2013* event to publicise the changes and new opportunities that would have been introduced at the market.

167. REDDITCH GROWTH AND LOCAL PLAN NO.4 PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Committee received a report on the Housing Growth and Local Plan Consultation further to that considered at the meeting on 12th February 2013.

Given the situation that had arisen through the draft Redditch Growth Consultation documents not being agreed at the previous meeting of the Council and the same documents receiving the approval of Councillors at Bromsgrove District Council, Officers detailed the potential difficulties that could face the Borough as a consequence. The Leader of Bromsgrove District Council had written to the Borough Council urging that it reconsider its earlier decision not to approve the draft Consultation documents and stressing that his Council was intending to proceed with public consultation from 1st April. The legal obligations on the Borough through the Duty to Cooperate were also highlighted and the consequences of failing to do so illustrated by reference to material in relation to Coventry City Council and the recent decision by the Planning Inspectorate to recommend withdrawal of its Core Strategy from further examination as a result of it being deemed to have failed to comply with the Duty to Cooperate.

Officers also brought to Members attention a letter which had been received from Birmingham City Council regarding the Duty to Cooperate and sought approval of an additional recommendation to take account of this. Officers suggested that they be allowed to continue to make minor changes to Appendices 2 and 3 to the report should the documents be agreed for consultation. The Committee's attention was also drawn to a typographical error which stated that the proposed consultation period on Redditch Growth should end on 13th May 2013 when it should, in fact, read 15th May 2013.

Members discussed the report at some length. It was suggested that the situation had not materially changed since the previous occasion on which this matter had been considered and, although it had been recommended for approval by the Committee, the consultation documents had not subsequently received the approval of Council. Officers were also asked whether Bromsgrove District Council had been requested to reconsider the inclusion of any additional sites within the consultation leaflet. Officers responded that they had no authority to request that Bromsgrove District Council consider any matters and it was again stressed that Bromsgrove had approved the documents for consultation as originally submitted. Officers did confirm that a number of sites to the north and west of Redditch had been presented to members at briefing session during the initial investigatory work on cross-boundary growth but that Officers from both authorities had subsequently undertaken a thorough assessment of the potential sites and had identified two preferred sites from those originally considered. It was proposed by Officers that the consultation documents continue to be developed to make it clear to the public

that their comments would be considered on any of the possible development sites.

In response to a suggestion that the consultation period be extended it was stressed that the Borough would be vulnerable to hostile development applications until a defensible Local Plan had been developed. Officers highlighted their willingness to meet with local residents to explain the documents further and to assist them in preparing responses to the consultation material. The process would conclude with a planning examination which would determine, in the light of all the responses submitted and the Consultation documents themselves, whether the proposals being put forward by the Borough were sound.

It was made clear that, in order to have any influence on these Growth Options, then the residents needed to engage with the consultation process and sound reasons put forward as to why the housing growth should be located somewhere other than in the two preferred locations. It was also made clear that Officers from the two authorities had developed their preferred options based on evidential grounds over a considerable period of time.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the consultation document, Housing Growth Consultation (Appendix 1) and the supporting background evidence report (Appendix 2) and the accompanying Sustainability Appraisal (Appendix 3) are approved for public consultation by Redditch Borough Council and Bromsgrove District Council between 1st April 2013 and 15th May 2013;**
- 2) the Draft Borough of Redditch Local Plan No.4 and the accompanying Sustainability Appraisal are approved for public consultation at a deferred date to align with the Housing Growth consultation which is between 1st April 2013 and 13th May 2013; and**
- 3) authority be delegated to the Head of Planning and Regeneration, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration, Economic Development and Transport, to consider the recent letter received from Birmingham City Council regarding the Duty to Cooperate and acknowledge that the duty will also apply to Birmingham City Council and other neighbouring authorities in relation to the Redditch Growth and Local Plan No.4 Consultation.**

168. GRANTS PROGRAMME 2013-14

The Committee considered the recommendations of the Grants Assessment Panel in respect of grants to voluntary sector organisations for 2013/14. A total of 42 applications worth an aggregate of £313,864 had been received for an over-all budget of £245,000.

Members noted that the scoring system appeared to be working effectively and were content to support the recommendations of the Panel.

RESOLVED that

grants be awarded to voluntary sector organisations as detailed in section 3.6 of the report submitted.

169. HOME ENERGY CONSERVATION ACT (HECA)

The meeting received a report which sought approval for submission to the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) of a report detailing progress thus far against obligations in relation to domestic home energy efficiency. This report to DECC also set out the Council's intention to use the Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation (ECO) as its main delivery mechanisms for HECA aims.

Members endorsed the Council's ambition to contribute to a reduction in fuel poverty and carbon emissions. It was also noted that two options were currently being considered in respect of the Green Deal.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the report (Appendix 1) be approved for submission to DECC and the consequent requirement to publish this report on the Council's website be noted; and**
- 2) the current position in relation to the Green Deal be noted.**

170. LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE

A report was considered which set out the operational arrangements proposed for the administration of Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans once responsibility for administering these loans passed to local authorities from 2013/14.

The new scheme was to be called the Essential Living Fund and, in a break with previous practice by the Department of Work and Pensions, it was proposed that applicants for loans for specific items be provided with those items rather than a cash equivalent wherever possible. By so doing it was hoped that the Council might meet the needs of applicants without the risk of money being used for other purposes and further, consequent, applications for loans being made.

Members appreciated the need to keep the scheme relatively flexible and non-prescriptive at the outset until an assessment could be made of its effectiveness. It was noted that a further report would be brought to the Committee in due course should Officers identify a need to reduce this flexibility.

RESOLVED that

the proposal for operation of the Scheme set out at Appendix 1 be approved.

171. QUARTERLY BUDGET MONITORING - QUARTER 3 - OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2012

A report detailing the Council's financial position at the end of the third quarter of the 2012/13 financial year was considered by the Committee.

The key message to be taken from the report was that the majority of the savings which Officers had hoped to achieve during the course of the year had been identified and there was confidence that the remainder could be attained during the final quarter. Failure to achieve projected savings would result in an increased use of balances.

RESOLVED that

the current financial position on Revenue and Capital be noted, as detailed in the report.

172. QUARTERLY CUSTOMER SERVICE MONITORING - QUARTER 3 - OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2012

The latest customer service monitoring report was considered by Members. An overall reduction in complaints was noted, and this was largely attributed to a significant drop in complaints regarding housing and repairs and maintenance. An accompanying drop in the numbers of complaints dealt with in 15 days was linked to the reduction in relatively straightforward housing-related complaints.

Other matters that were brought to Members' attention included the forthcoming introduction of a new call-handling system and a slow but steady rise in the numbers of payments made to the Council by electronic means. Those areas where customer complaints and suggestions had led to the revision of service delivery were also highlighted for the benefit of Members.

The Committee welcomed the introduction of the new phone system but did query current methods for dealing with calls that were unanswered as a result of Officers dealing with an existing call. Officers explained that this issue was often the result of their colleagues not using the full range of features available on the phone system.

RESOLVED that

the update for the period 1st October 2012 – 31st December 2012 be noted.

173. QUARTERLY SICKNESS MONITORING - QUARTER 3 - OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2012

Members received an update on sickness absence performance for the third quarter of 2012/13. Officers explained that there had been a seasonal increase in short term absence over the winter period, which was to be expected, and a slight increase in long term absences.

The Committee was reminded that the previously agreed changes in the Sickness Absence Policy were to come into effect from the beginning of 2013/14. In addition, weekly on-site clinics for occupational health had commenced and the appointment of a well-being officer was imminent.

RESOLVED that

the data relating to the quarter be noted.

174. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Members received the minutes of a recent meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 5th February 2013 be received and noted.

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

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

176. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

The Committee received the most recent report on the activity of the Council's Advisory Panels and similar bodies. It was noted that the Economic Advisory Panel had moved to an inclusive approach to its meetings with all Councillors invited to attend.

177. ACTION MONITORING

The Committee received the latest Action Monitoring report.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.16 pm