

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 4th March, 2014

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor David Bush (Chair), Councillor Gay Hopkins (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Andrew Brazier, Roger Bennett (substituting for Councillor Simon Chalk), Andrew Fry, Carole Gandy, Alan Mason, Yvonne Smith and Pat Witherspoon

Officers:

R Griffin, S Hanley, P McLaughlin and J Pickering

Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and A Scarce

107. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Simon Chalk. Councillor Roger Bennett attended the meeting as his substitute.

108. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest nor of any party whip.

The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources declared an other disclosable interest in respect of Item 9, Task Group Progress Reports (b) Football Task Group. She left the room during the delivery of this update and took no part in the discussions about this item.

109. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 4th February 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

110. DIAL A RIDE - MONITORING UPDATE REPORT

Officers presented the report on Dial A Ride Extended Service Monitoring and reminded Members that provision of the Dial A Ride vehicles out of standard operating hours for the service had followed a recommendation from the Youth Services Provision Task Group in 2012. In particular, Members had felt that use of the vehicles out of standard operating hours would provide a useful means of transport for young people. The following points were raised:

- The service had been dependent upon the good will of the drivers working outside of their contracted hours.
- Seven trips had been carried out over a 12 month period. This had included use by Leisure Services, the Redditch Older Peoples Forum and Environmental Services.
- Dial A Ride had obtained approximately £2,000 from the service.

Officers confirmed that the service was provided outside of the normal Dial A Ride operating hours which were Monday to Friday. In the future Officers hoped to be able to attract youth organisations and encourage them to use the service. Members discussed the following areas in more detail:

- The use of the service for sheltered housing schemes and in particular Mendip House.
- Promotion of the scheme to other organisations for example Scouts Groups.
- How the financial costs of a trip were calculated. Officers confirmed that this calculation was made in accordance with the drivers' hourly rate, fuel costs, a sum for wear and tear on the vehicle and a small fee to cover administration costs.
- The vehicles available were a 6 x 9 seater and 1 x 14 seater all of which provided disabled access.

RESOLVED that

the Dial A Ride Extended Service Monitoring Report be noted.

111. THREADNEEDLE HOUSE - INFORMATION REPORT

The Committee received a presentation in respect of the sales arrangements for Threadneedle House following a request from the Committee at its previous meeting. Officers provided background information and informed Members that there was a void rate

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 4th March, 2014

across Redditch of commercial office space estimated at between 25-30%.

The following areas were highlighted within the presentation and discussed by Members:

- Confirmation that Barclays bank had first discussed surrendering its lease in 2012 and the loss of income following the surrender.
- The financial benefits to receiving revenue included within the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- The assumption which had been made in respect of staff moving from Bromsgrove District Council into the vacant property and the income that could be generated from it.
- The impact of the empty unit and the refurbishment costs and the negotiated dilapidations sum received.
- Members questioned the valuation of the building and in particular the reduction in value when considered as an empty building and the calculation of the current value.
- The impact on business rates in respect of short term lets to charitable organisations.
- The area of the unit let to the Post Office and the continued rental received from this together with the number of years remaining on the lease and any formal discussions with them in respect of the possible sale of the unit.
- Members expressed concerns as to whether a developer would be happy for the Post Office to be retained in its current position. Members were keen to ensure that it remained in that position.
- A comparison in the rate of rental units per square foot in various parts of the Borough.
- The reduction in demand for large unit spaces and the length of leases available.
- The reference within the Local Plan in respect of the need for office space within the Borough.
- Tentative interest shown from organisations such as the NHS and the Police Authority.
- How the units were currently being marketed.
- The shortfall of housing within the Borough and the possible conversion to residential use (it was suggested that the ground floor should be retail with residential above) and any interest from developers.
- The impact of residential use on the surrounding area and car parking issues which may arise from such a development.
- It was confirmed that the market area would not initially be included within any negotiations.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 4th March, 2014

Members were informed that Threadneedle House would be marketed nationally as it was felt that a national group would have more appropriate contacts and cover a wider scope of potential developers. Local commercial agents tended to deal with much smaller units. Quotes had already been received and discussions had taken place in respect of guidelines and strategies in respect of potential bidders. Members were also provided with details of the potential fees charged for the sale of the building. There would be a guide price and an auction would be considered as an option. A final decision would be made following consideration of all the available professional advice. It was confirmed by Officers that actively marketing Threadneedle House had not as yet been progressed, pending the outcome of the discussions by the Committee at the meeting.

The Committee discussed the limited control which the Council had within the town centre and the potential impact on the surrounding area and the Palace Theatre in particular should Threadneedle House be sold and redeveloped for residential use. It was hoped that the development would bring a mix of both residential apartments together with retail units which would encourage a thriving café community and increase the footfall within the town centre. Planners had indicated that they would only allow retail units to be developed on the ground floor.

Members also discussed the following areas in more detail:

- Any involvement of the Redditch Town Centre Partnership to encourage community interest groups use of the building and to support works to make improvements to the building.
- The three small businesses which had been set up in the market area and problems it was understood they had encountered due to location.
- The use of rental income to offset borrowing and the loss of that rental income if the building was to be sold.
- The cost to the Council if the building was refurbished and/or breaking it up into individual units.
- The potential for joint venture working and whether this had been explored.
- The development of the market area and whether if this development work was carried out it could have a positive impact on the sale in the long term.
- The inclusion of the voluntary sector and how they preferred to be independent rather than sharing the use of a building.

Following further discussion it was

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **Property Services explore all options for use of Threadneedle House including sale, rent and joint venture; and**
- 2) **there should be very active marketing of Threadneedle House for let either as a whole building or in units.**

(During consideration of this item Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information. However, there is nothing exempt in this record of the proceedings.)

112. DRAFT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2013/14

Officers informed the Committee that the draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report contained details of the work of the Committee and the Task Groups carried out during the past 12 months and that it would be presented to Council at the meeting to be held on 31st March 2014 by the Chair of the Committee. It should be noted that there were additional photographs to be included prior to this presentation. The report recognised that a number of the Task Groups were continuing. It was noted that the photograph of Councillor Fry was slightly distorted and required adjustment.

The Chair thanked both Members of the Committee and Officers for their continued support with special recognition being given to Jess Bayley, Democratic Services Officer.

RESOLVED that

subject to the changes detailed above, the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report be submitted for the consideration of Council on 31st March 2014.

113. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received the minutes of the Executive Committee meetings held on 11th and 24th February 2014 together with the most recent edition of the Executive Work Programme.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the Executive Committee held on 11th and 24th February 2014 and the latest edition of the Executive Committee Work Programme be noted.

114. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor Gandy requested to bring forward an item on the subject of Members' IT. She informed Members that following a recent Task Group meeting it was apparent that a number of Members were experiencing similar problems and that in many cases these had not been report or Members had made alternative arrangements and therefore the IT Team were not aware of any issues.

Councillor Gandy did not believe that a Task Group was required to investigate this matter further, but that a presentation from the Head of Service together with a representative from the IT Team would be helpful. This would also be an opportunity for the IT Team to bring Members up to date with the forthcoming changes in respect of the PSN Secure Network implementation and the move towards the use of Ipads.

Particular areas of concern raised by Members were:

- Any relevant training and support that would be provided in respect of Ipads.
- The role out of Ipads.
- Appropriate IT for new Members.
- The process of reporting problems to the IT Helpdesk.

Those Members who already had the use of an Ipad commented on how useful they were and the improvements they had found when compared to previous equipment with which they had been issued. Councillor Bennett informed the Committee that he was a member of the Member Development Steering Group and at its last meeting the use of Ipads and the PSN Secure Network, which was an initiative from Central Government, had been discussed.

Following further discussion it was agreed that Officers would contact all Members for information about their IT needs and experiences and compile a list of issues that were raised prior to the meeting in order to give the IT Team an opportunity to prepare responses and focus their presentation.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Committee receive a presentation from the Head of Business Transformation and a representative from the IT team as detailed in the preamble above at the meeting to be held on 1st April 2014;
- 2) Officers to canvass all Members and compile a list of problems which have been raised; and
- 3) the Work Programme be noted subject to the inclusion of the above.

115. TASK GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The following updates in respect of current Task Group reviews were provided:

- a) Abbey Stadium Task Group – Chair, Councillor Carole Gandy

Councillor Gandy informed Members that the group had visited Stratford Leisure Centre which had been an interesting and useful visit and a good comparison to the visit they had made to Evesham Leisure Centre. The group had also interviewed Councillor Mould as Portfolio for Leisure and Tourism and discussed with him the plans for the Abbey Stadium and the forthcoming business case.

At a subsequent meeting Officers from Human Resources had been interviewed in respect of employment opportunities at the venue. The group had also interviewed an apprentice working within the Democratic and Legal Services team to get an inside view of the support she was receiving and why she had chosen to take up an apprenticeship.

- b) Football Provision within the Borough Task Group – Chair, Councillor David Bush

Councillor Bush raised concerns in respect of comments which had been made at the full Council meeting on 24th February 2014 by some Councillors. Councillor Bush's understanding of these comments in respect of Redditch United Football Club (RUFC) was that a decision had been made and that the work of the Task Group was unnecessary.

Members discussed how the Task Group's terms of reference covered football provision and its availability throughout the Borough and that consideration of RUFC was simply an element of the work being carried out. Officers confirmed that

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 4th March, 2014

a decision had been made at a meeting of the Executive Committee in November 2013, but that due process was being followed and any recommendations from the Task Group would be considered within that process. However, Officers currently had no mandate to take any further action.

Councillor Fry informed Members that no decision, other than that made by the Executive Committee in November 2013, had been made and that the Council was awaiting the outcome of the Task Group. Councillor Bush expressed concerns that two Portfolio Holders had made public statements, which he believed were to the detriment of the work of the Task Group. It was confirmed that this matter would be discussed further at the next meeting.

Councillor Bush informed Members that from the meetings that had already been held the work of the Task Group had been very productive. Members had interviewed relevant Officers from leisure services, including senior Officers. Concerns had been raised in respect of football access throughout the Borough and Members had gained an understanding of issues in respect of pitch size and the requirements of both the Football Association (FA) and Football League. The Task Group had also received a presentation from RUFC which had highlighted a major issue in respect of insufficient playing facilities and playing less time on the pitches. The Design Team appointed by RUFC had also been in attendance and had highlighted that they were unable to share the concerns raised in respect of the roundabout for the proposed new site, which would be taken forward.

Planning Officers were due to attend the following meeting and the FA had also been invited to attend. There had been some difficulty in arranging meetings and it was anticipated that the investigation would take four months rather than the original estimated three months. The issue of flooding from the River Arrow at the proposed new site was discussed and Councillor Bush confirmed that this would be taken up with Officers at the following meeting. Councillor Fry commented that he was enjoying the review and had learnt a lot particularly from RUFC and their architects' presentation, although he noted that their position and that of the Executive Committee were quite some way apart.

Councillor Gandy explained that the comments from the coaching staff at RUFC in respect of their work with young

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 4th March, 2014

people would have been useful for all Members and highlighted the work undertaken outside of the main team and within the community, which people might not have been aware of.

c) Joint Worcestershire Regulatory Services Scrutiny Task Group – Redditch Member, Councillor Alan Mason

Councillor Mason had been unable to attend the last meeting of the Task Group, however a written update had been provided within the agenda.

Officers informed Members that at the previous meeting of the group Members had interviewed a representative of the host authority's Legal Team together with the Chair of the Management Board. The main topic of discussion had been the governance arrangements for Worcestershire Regulatory Services.

The following meeting of the group would take place on 19th March during which Members would reflect on the progress they had made to date. The review had reached a stage where Members were beginning to discuss possible recommendations and remained on track to be completed in time to report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's June 2014 meeting.

d) Landscaping Task Group – Chair, Councillor Gay Hopkins

Councillor Hopkins informed Members that the group had formulated some draft recommendations and the draft report was in the process of being written. A final meeting had been arranged where this would be discussed prior to presentation to the Committee at its meeting on 1st April and then the Executive Committee on 8th April 2014.

e) Voluntary Sector Task Group – Chair, Councillor Pat Witherspoon

Councillor Witherspoon informed Members that Members were due to hold a meeting later that week to interview a representative of the Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN), an infrastructure organisation which worked with most Voluntary and Community Sector organisations in the Borough. Meetings were also planned for 14th and 19th March which included a visit to the Sandycroft Wellbeing Centre as a comparison to see what work was being carried

out at the other side of the Borough. The investigation would be completed in time for the final draft report to be presented to the Committee's July 2014 meeting.

(During consideration of this item the Executive Director for Finance and Corporate Resources declared an other disclosable interest in the update on the Football Task Group. She left the room and was not present during the delivery of this update).

RESOLVED that

the update reports be noted.

116. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Witherspoon informed Members that the main topic at the last meeting of the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) had been in respect of the plans for urgent care. Members present had been made aware that this would be going out to consultation with three events being held in Redditch and three in Bromsgrove. Members of the HOSC had not been happy with the document provided; it contained lots of acronyms, which many people had found difficult to understand, and there had been several complaints about the general language used within the document. The HOSC had asked that the document be reviewed after taking on board the comments received from Members.

The GP Ambulance service had also been discussed and concerns continued to be raised and which needed to be taken up by the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs). There had also been a further incident on the Bromsgrove Highway bridge and concerns had been raised again in respect of this. It was understood that the notices mentioned at a previous meeting had in fact been installed at the instigation of the local Community Safety Team, but there remained concern that this was not sufficient action. The Chair of HOSC had written to the Health and Wellbeing Board asking for this issue to be given further consideration. There had also been a similar incident in a different area and the cost of such incidents had been raised.

There had been limited discussion about the future of the Alexandra Hospital although this would be going out to further consultation shortly.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 4th March, 2014

117. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND 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 matter on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of the said Act, as amended, in respect of Threadneedle House – Information Report (as detailed in Minute 111 above).

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.12 pm