

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 16 December 2014

MINUTES

Present:

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

Also Present:

Councillors Carole Gandy, Pattie Hill and Pat Witherspoon

Officers:

Jess Bayley, Clare Flanagan, Sue Hanley, Sam Morgan and Jayne Pickering

Committee Services Officer:

Debbie Parker-Jones

69. APOLOGIES

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

70. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

71. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Additional Papers

Members' attention was drawn to the Additional Papers pack which contained the minutes of the meeting of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Shared Services Joint Committee held on 27th November 2014. It was noted that there were no recommendations to be considered.

.....
Chair

Time To Change Pledge

Following Full Council's endorsement of the Time To Change Pledge on 8th December, the Leader signed a display presentation board for the Council's Pledge.

Work Programme

It was noted that the Review of Financial Resilience report which had originally appeared on the Executive Work Programme for the meeting that evening had not been required and had therefore been deleted.

The Landscape Improvements to the Town Centre Phase II report which was listed on the Work Programme for the 20th January 2015 meeting had been delayed and would at this stage remain on the Work Programme without a set date.

Taliban attack on school in Peshawar, Pakistan

Members noted with great shock and sadness the Taliban attack which had taken place earlier that day on an army school in Peshawar, North-west Pakistan, in which over 100 children and members of staff had lost their lives.

Redditch had a large Pakistani community and Members sent their sincere sympathies and condolences to the families of those who had been injured or killed in the terrorist attack.

The Leader requested that a letter be sent from himself and the Mayor to Redditch Central Mosque and the High Commission for Pakistan in London expressing the Council's deep sadness at the news.

72. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 25th November 2014 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

73. PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE TO TUDOR GRANGE ACADEMY SHORT, SHARP REVIEW - FINAL REPORT

Councillor Pat Witherspoon, Chair of the Proposals for Change by Tudor Grange Academy Short, Sharp Review group, presented the group's final report. She was accompanied by Councillors Carole Gandy and Pattie Hill who also took part in the Review.

The report proposed three recommendations, only the first of which needed to be approved by the Executive Committee as this required action by the Chief Executive. Recommendations 2 and 3 had already been referred direct to Worcestershire County Council and the Executive Committee was therefore asked to note those proposals. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had endorsed all three recommendations.

The following were noted as the key objectives of the Review:

- To understand the proposals by Tudor Grange Academy to extend the age range of pupils;
- To assess the potential impact on schooling arrangements in the Borough if the proposals were to be implemented; and
- Through investigation of this proposal and the basis on which academy schools operate, to support Ward Councillors and residents in understanding how they can best contribute most effectively to the debate and decision on this issue.

It was specifically noted that the group was not tasked with determining whether the changes proposed by Tudor Grange Academy Redditch (TGAR) should be implemented, the outcome of which Members were not able to influence. Members were also not asked to reach any conclusions about three-tier and two-tier education or which system would be preferable for the Borough in the long-term.

Evidence had been gathered from a range of sources including representatives of Tudor Grange Academy Redditch (TGAR); Karen Lumley MP; Councillor Rebecca Blake, the Redditch Democratic Alliance, local schools and representatives of the Redditch School Changes Action group

The group concluded that TGAR had followed, and in part exceeded, the proper process set out by the government when proposing and consulting on changes to their school admissions. However, the process set down by the government did not address the specific needs of schools and school pyramids in a three-tier education system and it was felt that this needed to be updated to reflect those considerations.

Whilst it was the group's view that TGAR had good intentions with the proposed changes, feedback received from other schools in the town indicated that ideally more action could have been taken when consulting on the changes. Examples of other schools in the area which had consulted informally with parents about a potential change from a three-tier to a two-tier system had shown that

additional steps outside the formal process could have been implemented which would have helped address local concerns.

It was felt that uncertainty surrounding the future of other schools in the pyramid created confusion and in some cases anger amongst parents about the proposed changes. Members felt this uncertainty contributed to the decision by some schools to consult on their own changes which in turn potentially created greater uncertainty. Poor communication, by both TGAR and the County Council, was also found to have compounded confusion amongst parents.

The speed with which the consultation was announced and the lack of significant discussions with other schools prior to TGAR's announcement about the proposed changes led stakeholders to conclude that the proposals were a fait accompli. It was felt that when proposing changes all schools should communicate their rationale to key stakeholders and the extent to which feedback would inform any outcomes of the process.

The group had been informed by the lead officer for the County Council that Worcestershire County Council lacked the power and resources to undertake a whole scale review of the education system in the Borough. Recent legislation had provided academy schools with significant powers and any review conducted by the local education authority could not make decisions that would be binding for academy schools. The group felt that whilst the County Council could not determine the outcomes of TGAR's proposed changes to their admissions policy, as the local education authority, they could have taken more action to co-ordinate consultation responses and to clarify the process that needed to be followed.

The group had attempted to consult with ward Councillors for the TGAR catchment area but were disappointed with the lack of responses received. As such, the group could not form any conclusions about the needs of ward Councillors and had therefore suggested that in future group leaders strongly urge their members to respond when consulted by a scrutiny Task Group.

It was noted that TGAR had originally proposed that the changes would come into effect from September 2015, and that given the nature of the changes these were eligible to be fast tracked. However, in light of feedback received to the consultation, the school Governing Body had, at a meeting on 13th August 2014, decided that they would instead be submitting a business case to the Education Funding Agency (EFA) by September 2014, with the intention to implement any changes from September 2016. It was understood that a decision had not yet been made by the EFA or Regional Schools Commissioner for the West Midlands regarding the school's proposals.

The Executive welcomed the report and thanked the group for its hard work on this. In relation to the disappointment expressed by the group on the low number of questionnaires submitted by Borough Councillors, and the suggestion that in future the political group leaders take an active role in encouraging their members to respond to any scrutiny consultation, the Leader stated that he would be happy to encourage his members provided he was made aware that such consultation was taking place, which was not the case on this occasion.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Chief Executive of Redditch Borough Council should write to the Secretary of State for Education, the Right Honourable Nicky Morgan MP, and the Minister of State for Schools, the Right Honourable David Laws MP, to request that specific guidance be issued to schools about changing the age range of their pupils in a three-tier education system. This guidance should address the process that must be followed in cases where a school unilaterally decides to make changes that will impact on other schools in the local authority area and / or within a school pyramid; and**

RESOLVED to note that Worcestershire County Council had been asked by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to:

- 2) **consult with Borough Councillors alongside County Councillors when commissioning educational services (within the remit of the Head of Learning and Achievement); and**
- 3) **To produce written guides about the education system and the process that needs to be followed when charges are made to schools. These guides should be produced in plain English and should be made available for parents and other interested stakeholders to access.**

**74. CONSOLIDATED REVENUE & CAPITAL MONITORING REPORT
QUARTER 2 2014/15**

Members considered the consolidated revenue and capital outturn position for the period April to September 2014.

Officers stated that whilst there was currently a shortfall of £212k in identified savings these would be achieved by vacancy management and other savings during the financial year.

Heads of Service and managers were continuing to look at where savings could be made and whilst carry forwards in budgets could be made available to Heads of Service under delegated authority, Heads of Service would be looking at where savings could be made to ensure that only necessary underspends were carried forward.

The financial commentary detailed in the report in relation to the £740k asbestos underspend was noted, together with the proposed virements from the asbestos budget to address other overspends within the Capital Programme. The £77k requested from Housing Revenue Account reserves to fund the demolition of Upper Norgrove House based on health and safety concerns was also noted.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the current financial position on Revenue and Capital as detailed in the report be noted;**
- 2) the following virements for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Programme be approved:**

the Asbestos budget be reduced by £290K to fund the following Capital Schemes:

**£50K Kitchen Upgrades
£200K to Rewiring
£40K to Window Replacements; and**

- 3) £77K be released from the HRA reserves to fund the demolition of Upper Norgrove House.**

75. BUDGET POSITION STATEMENT

Officers provided Members with an oral update on the latest budget position for 2015/16.

Members were advised that whilst there was not currently a balanced budget for the medium term, a 3-year sustainable budget plan would be presented to Full Council in February 2015. This was a similar position to many other local authorities. Officers added that there was a general assumption that by 2019/20 Councils would have to be self-funding.

The original predicted budget shortfall for 2015/16 had been £2,314m, with further predicted shortfalls for 2016/17 and 2017/18 of £432k and £886k respectively. The latest projected shortfalls stood at £462k for 2015/16, which included a one-off use of £500k from reserves, £818k for 2016/17 and £970k for 2017/18.

The figures included a £300k reduction in pension costs as a result of an increase in the number of permitted payment years, total New Homes Bonus of £802k, minimum annual bid of £30k to continue Essential Living Fund Support should funding for this be withdrawn from the County Council and an assumed annual Council Tax increase of 1.9%.

It was assumed that there would be a reduction of approximately £500k in the Government Grant from 2014/15, the final figure for which should be made known within the following week or so, and a pay increase of 2.2%. Any cuts in funding from the County Council would hopefully be made known early in 2015, and Officers had stressed to the County Council that they needed to be informed of any cuts as soon as possible.

Officers advised that a great deal of work would be carried out over the following few weeks to produce a sustainable 3-year budget for Executive Committee on 3rd February 2015. This would then be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17th February, prior to Full Council on 23rd February. More detail would be included in the budget on how the proposed £645k of Strategic Purpose savings would be made, and from which services and transformation projects savings had been made.

Officers stated that the Council's external auditors, Grant Thornton, were comfortable with the approach being taken on the budget for 2015/16 and for the following 2 years.

Members thanked Officers and the Portfolio Holder for their work on the budget and were pleased to hear that Grant Thornton were comfortable with the current position. A measured approach had been taken with the budget in recent years, the results of which were now being seen.

RESOLVED that

the position be noted.

76. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10th November 2014.

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 10th November 2014 be received and noted.

77. WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES SHARED SERVICES JOINT COMMITTEE

The Committee received, under Additional Papers, the minutes of the meeting of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Shared Services Joint Committee held on 27th November 2014.

It was noted that there were no recommendations to consider.

Members noted that Capita had withdrawn from the strategic partnership procurement process and that WRS Officers would now be determining the shape of future service delivery. Whilst there had been some disappointment expressed at the meeting at Capita's withdrawal, the level of service provided and high reputation gained by WRS had been noted.

The Leader advised that subsequent to the WRS meeting it had been announced that Steve Jordan, Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services, had obtained a promotion as Head of Paid Service at South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council, and would be leaving his current post in the New Year. It was agreed that a letter be sent on behalf of the Executive to express their sincere thanks to Mr Jordan for the work he had undertaken in delivering an excellent Regulatory Services for all in Redditch and wishing him success in his new position.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Shared Services Joint Committee held on 27th November 2014 be received and noted.

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

There were no outstanding referrals to consider.

79. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

Councillor Chance advised that the Economic Theme Group under the Local Strategic Partnership, which had replaced the Economic Advisory Panel, had met on a couple of occasions and was proving to be very successful forum. The membership included

representatives from local businesses, the Heart of Worcestershire College and Borough Councillors.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

80. ACTION MONITORING

Members were advised that no update on the information requested at the 8th September 2014 meeting in relation to the Finance Monitoring Report 2014/15 April to June (Quarter 1) was yet available.

Officers undertook to find out the details for the questions raised and to report back to all members of the Committee on this.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.40 pm

.....
Chair