

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 14 January
2009

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Phil Mould (Chair), and Councillors K Banks, M Chalk, W Hartnett, R King, W Norton, D Taylor and D Thomas

Also Present:

P Anderson and M Collins

Committee Services Officer:

Jess Bayley and Helen Saunders

134. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Smith.

135. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or of any party whip.

136. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Wednesday 17 December be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

137. ACTIONS LIST

The Committee considered its list of agreed actions and specific mention was made of the following matters:

1) Fishing Tackle Heritage Museum - Proposed Review

Officers referred to item one on the Actions List and explained that Councillor Hunt had produced a draft scoping document

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Chair

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 14 January 2009

for a proposed review of the town's Fishing Tackle Heritage. This review would focus on whether it would be appropriate for the Council to establish a National Angling Museum within the Borough.

Members were informed that the scoping document for this proposed review would be submitted for Members' consideration at a meeting of the Committee on Wednesday 18 March.

2) Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Additional Meeting

Officers explained that the special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, when Members were scheduled to consider the Medium Term Financial Strategy, had been postponed. The meeting had been rescheduled to take place on Monday 9 February.

RESOLVED that

subject to the above comments, the contents of the Actions List be noted.

138. CALL-IN AND PRE-SCRUTINY

The Committee discussed the Forward Plan for 1 January - 30 April 2009. Members noted that an item scheduled for consideration by the Executive Committee on 11 March, the Council's Corporate Plan – Part 2, would be suitable for pre-scrutiny. The Committee agreed that a review of the Corporate Plan should take place at the Committee meeting scheduled for 25 February. Members requested that Officers provide copies of the Corporate Plan in draft format and an executive summary in the form of a PowerPoint presentation at that meeting.

Members expressed concerns with the decision to move to a shared services model with Bromsgrove District Council for both the Electoral Services and Community Safety functions within the Council. At a previous Shared Services Board meeting and subsequent Executive Committee meeting, Members had asked a series of questions enquiring how the Council planned to reconcile the differences between staff terms and conditions and Human Resources policies of the two Councils. Members felt that they had not received satisfactory answers to these questions and questioned whether this issue would be worthy of a Call-in or of further scrutiny. Officers confirmed that, as the Decision Notice had not been issued, the item could not yet be called in. Officers

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 14 January 2009

offered to clarify whether this issue qualified as a Call-in. The Committee agreed that the issue should be pursued either as a Call-in or as an exercise for further scrutiny.

In addition, some Members felt that the information that had been provided regarding the savings made by implementing joint Chief Executive arrangements had lacked sufficient detail. Members therefore also requested that this issue should either be subject to a Call-in or be reviewed as a piece of scrutiny work.

RESOLVED that

- 1) subject to arrangements detailed in the preamble above, the Council's Corporate Plan be considered by the Committee at the meeting scheduled for 25 February;**
- 2) the decision to include Electoral Services and Community Safety under a shared services agreement subject to either Call-in or further scrutiny; and**
- 3) the information provided to Members regarding the savings made by the implementation of joint Chief Executive arrangements be subject to either Call-in or further scrutiny.**

139. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for consideration at the meeting.

140. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee received reports in relation to current reviews.

- a) Council Flat Communal Cleaning – Chair, Councillor P Mould

The Chair explained that the members of the Council Flat Communal Cleaning Task and Finish Group would be attending a meeting of the Borough Tenants' Panel. The Group had also arranged to host a meeting with local leaseholders and tenants. He informed Members that the Group believed that there should be a standard level of cleaning for communal areas across the Borough and that this should be reflected in the details of the Council's cleaning contract. This standard should be comparable to the quality of cleaning service already received at locations such as Evesham Mews. The Group felt that it was important to

consult with all leaseholders and tenants who might be affected by these proposals.

b) Third Sector – Chair, Councillor D Thomas

The Chair of the Third Sector Task and Finish Group informed Members that the recommendations from the review had been considered at a special meeting of the Executive Committee and had been approved.

RESOLVED that

the reports be noted.

141. ROLE OF THE MAYOR REVIEW - FINAL REPORT

The Role of the Mayor Task and Finish Group's final report was presented by the Chair of the Group, Councillor Chalk. He explained that, at the request of the Committee, the report had been amended to include information about the costs that would be incurred if the recommendations were approved.

The Chair explained that he did not agree with recommendation 2: *'we recommend that resources be made available for small receptions and semi informal engagements'*. He felt that it was not appropriate for Officers of the Council to be involved in serving refreshments at informal Mayoral meetings.

Members asked what the current hospitality allowance was for the Mayor. Officers confirmed that the hospitality budget was set at £1,170 per year. The Chair suggested that if the Mayoral hospitality allowance was increased by approximately £1,000, this would provide future Mayors with extra resources to hire serving staff for functions if they so wished. The Committee agreed that a revenue bid should be submitted to request an additional £1,000 for the Mayoral hospitality allowance and that recommendation 2 be altered to reflect this suggestion.

Members discussed recommendation 3: *'that the Council contact all representatives from the business sector in the town, informing them that it is possible for senior personnel within their business to be received by the Mayor'*. Members felt that this recommendation might lead to the perception that the Mayor favoured some business organisations over others. It was suggested that the extra funds made available through the implementation of recommendation 2 should provide future Mayors with the resources

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 14 January 2009

to contact and entertain local businesses if that was something they wished to do. The Committee therefore agreed to remove recommendation 3.

Members also voiced concerns regarding recommendation 6: '*we recommend that the Mayor's Parlour be improved*'. Members commented that the estimated cost of £12,000 to open up a terrace from the Mayor's Parlour would be unlikely to cover the work that was needed. It was also felt that any potential health and safety implications of installing a balcony had not been fully investigated. However, Members agreed that the Mayor's Parlour was in need of redecoration and approved the suggestion in the report that approximately £800 should be made available to undertake this redecoration. The Committee requested that recommendation 6 be rewritten to reflect these changes.

In addition, the Committee agreed to keep recommendation 1: '*that a picture of the current Mayor be placed in a prominent position within the Town Hall*'; recommendation 5: '*that the Mayoral induction booklet be improved*'; and recommendation 7: '*the content of the Mayoral web pages be developed and extended*'.

The Committee agreed that recommendation 4: '*that a display cabinet be installed in the reception area in the Town Hall in which small items from Redditch's history are displayed*' should not be approved.

Members raised general concerns about the Role of the Mayor Review exercise. It was felt by some Members that the exercise should not have been approved as a scrutiny review. Other Members commented that the Overview and Scrutiny function provided all non-Executive Councillors with an opportunity to influence all policy and protocol of the Council and that this had therefore been a suitable topic for further investigation.

RESOLVED that

- 1) recommendation 2 be amended to incorporate the request to increase the Mayoral hospitality budget by £1,000 in accordance with the preamble above;**
- 2) recommendation 3 and 4 be removed as detailed in the preamble above;**
- 3) recommendation 6 be amended to reflect the request that £800 be made available to redecorate the Mayor's Parlour; and**

- 4) **the Executive Committee be asked to consider the recommendations of the Role of the Mayor Task and Finish Group, as amended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and as detailed above.**

142. HOUSING MUTUAL EXCHANGE

The Chair advised that, in discussion with the Chair of the Housing Mutual Exchange exercise, Councillor Smith, it had been decided that this piece of work would be more effectively delivered as a Task and Finish Group exercise rather than at the full Committee level.

The Chair explained that Officers would be in contact with all O&S Members inviting them to register their interest in participating in this Review with their Party Group Leader.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **a Task and Finish Group be established to scrutinise Housing Mutual Exchange; and**
- 2) **Officers contact all Members to invite them to register their interest in taking part in this exercise.**

143. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - LEISURE AND TOURISM (COUNCILLOR PETER ANDERSON)

The Chair welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism, Councillor Anderson, to the meeting. Councillor Anderson began by updating the Committee on the progress of the Abbey Stadium Redevelopment scheme. He explained that the appointed developers for the scheme, Drivers Jonas, were due to attend a forthcoming Leisure Contracts Advisory Panel meeting to provide an overview of the final business plan.

Councillor Anderson explained that projects of this type were expensive and financial issues had been a cause for concern from the beginning of the project. These had been further exacerbated by the current economic crisis.

Members asked what level of confidence Councillor Anderson had in the project starting in the next two years. He explained he felt that the project had only a 5% chance of beginning over the next two years, owing to the current economic climate. Members

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 14 January 2009

queried if the consultants involved in the delivery of the project would be paid oncosts. Councillor Anderson explained that this was not the case and advised of some of the terms of the contract which covered such matters.

Members questioned Councillor Anderson's views on the usage of the Palace Theatre. Councillor Anderson informed the Committee that staff at the theatre had been working to secure acts of good quality and variety and that any of the acts they booked that were deemed to be successful would be booked again in the future. One of the ongoing concerns for the theatre was the average age of theatre-goers. Audiences in the past had been made up of older people with very few under the age of thirty. Councillor Anderson felt that the introduction of a multi-tier pricing system might help with this issue and to fill the upstairs circle seats which were often left empty.

Members commented that the issue with age was likely to continue to be a problem due to the ageing population. It was also noted that some of the acts booked at the theatre had not appealed to younger audiences. Councillor Anderson stressed to the Committee that he felt that it was not essential to make a profit from the theatre but that it should be viewed more as a community asset.

Members questioned whether, using the 'Room Upstairs', it would be possible to broaden the usage of the theatre by showcasing films. Councillor Anderson acknowledged that this had been done occasionally and that this had broadened the appeal of other similar arts complexes in Worcestershire: including the Artrix in Bromsgrove; and Number 8 in Pershore. Members noted that any films shown at the Palace Theatre would have to be of the smaller, independent variety so as not to come into direct competition with the Apollo Cinema in the Kingfisher Centre. Members agreed that a recommendation should be made that the Executive Committee considers the option of using the Room Upstairs at the Palace Theatre as a cinema.

The Committee asked about the level of the usage of the Council's outdoor facilities. Councillor Anderson explained that the Borough offered a large number of cricket, football, hockey, and rugby pitches. In order to increase use of these pitches and, in particular the tennis courts, Councillor Anderson felt there was a need to establish more clubs to support them. To maintain the quality of the pitches, Councillor Anderson suggested that at the end of each season, football posts should be taken down and moved to alternative locations in order to reseed and rest the heavily used pitches.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 14 January 2009

In response to the Committee's question regarding the opportunity of managing leisure facilities for Bromsgrove District Council as part of the Shared Services agenda, Councillor Anderson informed the Committee that it might be possible for the Council to undertake the management of Bromsgrove's leisure facilities such as the Dolphin Leisure Centre. However, before this could happen the Council would have to consider the personnel implications of doing this.

Councillor Anderson told the Committee that tourism had had very little impact on the town. However, there were many assets in the town that could be maximised to attract visitors from outside the area including: three major woodland areas; two large parks with green flag awards; and several attractive buildings. Members questioned if any steps had been taken to promote the numerous walks and trails in the Borough. Members commented that they had been told that the finance was not available to produce any promotional material of this nature. Members suggested that a different trail should be featured in each edition of the soon to be re-introduced Council newspaper. The Committee agreed to make this recommendation to the Executive Committee.

Councillor Anderson explained to the Committee that he had concerns regarding the usage of the Countryside Centre. He explained that this building had been built using a grant from Worcestershire County Council but that it was far larger than originally intended. He felt that it would be a worthwhile exercise to identify what uses could be made of this building could be put to and suggested that this exercise could be undertaken as part of the scrutiny process at some point in the future.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the Executive Committee request Officers to publish a different walking trail within the Borough as a feature in each future edition of the civic newspaper; and**
- 2) the Executive Committee request Officers to consider using the Room Upstairs at the Palace Theatre also as a cinema facility;**

all as detailed in the preamble above.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 14 January 2009

144. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - QUESTIONS

The arrangements for the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety's Portfolio Annual Report were considered by the Committee. Members agreed a number of questions for the Portfolio Holder to address during her Annual Report.

145. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

146. WORK PROGRAMME

It was noted that, as the Committee would be considering the Council's Corporate Plan Part 2 at its meeting on 25 February, the Chair had agreed to defer some of the items originally scheduled to be considered at this meeting.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Review of Ditches and the update on the implementation of the Fees and Charges Charging Policy be deferred to the Committee's meeting on 18 March 2009;**
- 2) **subject to which adjustment, the Work Programme be noted.**

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.50 pm