

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 5th February, 2013

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Juliet Brunner (Chair), Councillor Simon Chalk (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Andrew Brazier, David Bush, Andrew Fry, Pattie Hill and Pat Witherspoon

Also Present:

Councillor Brenda Quinney

Officers:

L Berry, R Cooke, C Felton, T Kristunas, J Pickering, S Singleton, J Staniland and D Wheeler

Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and M Craggs

135. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors John Fisher and Gay Hopkins.

136. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

137. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 8th January be approved as a true and correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.

138. FEES AND CHARGES 2013/14

The Committee received a report which outlined the proposed fees and charges for 2013/14 for the Council's chargeable services.

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Chair

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Members returned a number of comments regarding the proposed charges within Leisure and Cultural Services. In particular, it was suggested that more could be done to encourage families to visit Council owned gymnasiums. To address this it was agreed that this suggestion should be referred to the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism.

Upon it being suggested that charges for swimming and badminton appeared excessive, Officers explained that the charges were comparable with fees levied by other local authorities, and that income generation was essential to sustain existing services, including free swimming for over 60 and under 16 year olds.

Officers clarified that each promotion and performance split at the Palace Theatre was agreed on an individual basis. This was common industry practice and was proving to be far more beneficial to the Council than the earlier practice of guaranteeing artists a set fee.

Regarding charges under Regulatory Services, Officers agreed to provide clarification on why the fees listed for gambling act permits and gaming machine permits had not changed since the previous year.

Finally, it was suggested that there should be three price brackets for potential dwellings in relation to pre-application advice to help encourage small housing developments in the town. Officers agreed to take this suggestion into account as part of the Planning transformation process.

RECOMMENDED that

that the fees and charges for 2013/14 as set out in Appendix A - H to the report be approved; other than in cases where:-

- a) fees or charges are statutory,**
- b) fees and charges are set externally, or**
- c) other Council- approved circumstances apply.**

139. INITIAL ESTIMATES 2013/14 - 2015/16

The Committee was informed that the Council's final settlement grant from Government had now been confirmed. Overall, this

amounted to a 43% reduction in government grant from 2012/13 to 2015/16 inclusive. Approximately £1.5m worth of savings was still to be found during 2014 – 2016. However, no revenue budget bids had yet to be received, and the Council was not facing any unavoidable financial pressures. Local authorities across the country were under severe pressure not to raise Council Tax, therefore the onus was on Councils to re-structure existing services in response to financial pressures.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Officers for their hard work in mitigating the impact on front-line services.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

140. REDDITCH MARKET TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT

As Chair of the Review, Councillor Andrew Brazier presented the Committee with the findings and recommendations of the Redditch Market Task Group.

Members heard that the group and Chair in an individual capacity had visited a number of different markets in an attempt to learn what was working well elsewhere and what could feasibly be introduced in Redditch. The group had also consulted with traders and local residents. This prompted a number of very useful ideas, many of which it was recommended should be taken forward by a new permanent working group for the market that would comprise of key town centre stakeholders and the Chair of the Review Group, at least on an initial basis.

Central to their recommendations, the group proposed that a new strategy for the market should be developed to help plan how the market could be revitalised during the next few years. It was recommended that this should include a recruitment and retention plan for new traders, and incorporate a formal communications and marketing plan to help promote key events.

The group was also proposing that the number of general retail market days should be reduced to no more than three each week, and that more speciality markets should be facilitated on the non-retail market days. Members felt that the town centre could no longer sustain holding a retail market on five days a week. It was thought that these measures would help offer far more choice and selection to market customers, and attract those who did not currently visit the market.

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The Chair of the group asserted that, despite difficult economic times, markets could continue to be successful if they adapted to changes in customer shopping habits and expectations, and commented that the recommended actions contained in the report could help restore Redditch Market as a central attraction for the local community.

Councillor Brazier thanked the Committee for the opportunity to lead on the review and urged Members to approve the recommendations.

The Committee welcomed the report and congratulated the group on its work. Members felt that more should be done to help the market become more competitive, especially with low price convenience stores. However, caution was urged regarding the potential costs involved with arranging speciality markets.

Finally, Members were made aware that relevant Officers would need to liaise with North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration to determine whether any of the recommended actions would require the existing Service Level Agreement to operate the market to be renegotiated.

RECOMMENDED that

- 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;**

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- 5) the market working group considers the feasibility of introducing an on-site Redditch Market information point;
- 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;
- 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;
- 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;

- 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.

141. LIVING WAGE - SUGGESTED SCRUTINY REVIEW

At the request of Council, the Committee considered whether to investigate proposals for all Council employees to receive the living wage of £7.45 per hour as a minimum. The matter had been raised as a Motion on Notice at the Council meeting on 15th January 2013.

Members were agreed that more information should be presented at a future meeting before a final decision was made on whether to undertake further investigation on the issue. In particular, it was thought that the findings of the equal pay review would provide much greater clarity on the number of staff that would be affected.

RESOLVED that

additional information be requested from a relevant source before deciding whether or not further investigation is required.

142. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TRAINING - FEEDBACK

Officers referred to the main points that were taken from the scrutiny skills training session that was delivered on Thursday 17th January 2013. In particular, undertaking careful preparation ahead of meetings was essential to ensure that interviews with expert witnesses were carried out effectively. Members were also advised not to ask more questions of witnesses than was absolutely necessary.

The Chair felt that the session had been very useful and thanked all who had attended.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

143. ACTIONS LIST

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Actions List be noted.

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

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 15th January 2013 and the latest edition of the Executive Committee Work Programme be noted.

145. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

Councillor David Bush presented a draft scoping document concerning housing density targets in Redditch. It was suggested to Members that now was an appropriate time to undertake a scrutiny review into this matter given that the Council's local planning framework document was out for public consultation and that this was an important issue that required greater scrutiny.

Officers expressed concern that much of the proposal appeared to duplicate the work of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment. It was also explained that the Council's Planning Advisory Panel had already addressed the town's housing density issues while reviewing Council's local planning framework document. The Council possessed a number of policies that allowed for a wide range of housing density developments, therefore it was not understood how the existing flexibility for housing development would be affected. Furthermore, it was explained that the Council could not insist that certain land was specified for self-build purposes.

Members offered competing views into whether the proposed Task Group review was necessary. It was argued that the Committee could look at this issue in greater detail than the Planning Advisory Panel, especially the impact of housing density targets on multigenerational and larger families. Conversely, however, it was suggested that the Council already possessed adequate monitoring procedures for its housing development policies.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Housing Density Targets Task Group be launched; and
- 2) Councillor Bush be appointed as Chair of the review group.

146. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee received the following reports in relation to current reviews:

a) Arts and Culture Centre – Chair, Councillor Gay Hopkins

Members were informed that a number of meetings had taken place since the previous meeting of the Committee. The Group had considered 359 responses from residents and was scheduled to consider feedback received from local arts groups on the potential development of an arts and culture centre in the town.

The review was remained on course to be completed in time for the final report to be considered by the Committee on 2nd April 2013.

b) Redditch Market – Chair, Councillor Andrew Brazier

There was no update as the final report had already been considered by the Committee.

RESOLVED that

the update report be noted.

147. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Witherspoon provided the Committee with a brief verbal summary of most recent Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) meeting on 24th January 2013.

Members were advised that members of the Joint Services Review (JSR) into the configuration of acute hospital services in the county had attended the meeting. The JSR team supported the centralisation of key services, including in-patient obstetrics and accident and emergency, at Worcestershire Royal Hospital.

It was initially thought that public consultation on the proposed changes would take place before the Purdah pre-election period,

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however it was now understood that this might not take place until after the county council elections.

HOSC Members had also been informed that the closure of Berkeley Ward, which provided South Worcestershire's specialist dementia beds, was expected to produce financial savings with minimum disruption to patient care.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

148. CRIME AND DISORDER SCRUTINY PANEL - CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair of the Redditch Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel, Councillor Andrew Brazier, delivered an overview of his report from the most recent Panel meeting on 31st January 2013.

Members were informed that, in taking an in-depth look at the 2012/13 quarter three performance tables for the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership for Redditch, the Panel had been pleased to learn that there had been a decrease in reported incidents for most areas of crime. In some instances, the decrease was in excess of ten per cent compared to the previous year.

Having welcomed Chris Wainwright from the Hereford and Worcester Rescue Service to the meeting, he had informed the Panel of an interesting scheme that the service ran in partnership with West Mercia Probation Trust to provide recent young offenders with support in gaining education, training, and employment opportunities.

The following Panel meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday 28th March 2013, at 6.30pm.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted

149. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

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150. WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.37 pm