

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

8th October 2013

MINUTES

Present:

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

Also Present:

S Hazelden and S Lewis (Rotala PLC)

Officers:

C Felton, J Godwin, J Pickering and J Staniland, Exec Director - Planning & Regeneration, Regulatory and Housing Services

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and M Craggs

55. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Alan Mason.

56. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

57. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10th September 2013 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

58. VACANT REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL PROPERTIES

Officers provided a summary of the report that explained the current position regarding Council owned vacant non-dwelling properties in the Borough.

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Chair

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It was clarified that a report to the Executive Committee on the future options for Threadneedle House was expected to be considered early in the New Year. Redditch Borough Council would accrue additional income by accommodating Officers from Bromsgrove District Council in Redditch Town Hall and therefore Bromsgrove staff would no longer need to use Threadneedle House.

A buyer had yet to be identified for the former REDI Centre on South Street. A report seeking approval for the property to be marketed for disposal was scheduled to be considered by Council on 14th October 2013. Any final decision to sell the property to a community group would be taken by Officers. The Executive Committee would be notified in advance of any sale being sanctioned. Furthermore, it was confirmed that any community group could apply to purchase Upper Norgrove House on Church Road as an asset of community value.

The Committee was advised that the retail units adjacent to the former covered market area outside the Debenhams Store in the Kingfisher Shopping Centre were owned by the Council. However, none of these units were empty but were predominantly being used by local charities for storage.

Members expressed concern regarding the former covered market area in general, including whether the area could legitimately be used for car parking. The safety implications of using this area as a car park were debated and Members commented that this could potentially be hazardous for pedestrians. Concern was also raised about the closure of a public toilet in the area that was previously used by customers and staff.

A representative from the Town Centre Partnership (TCP) informed Members that the TCP was planning to introduce new all-weather play facilities to help redefine it as a public owned outdoor play area, though a number of issues remained to be resolved. Due to their interest in this subject the Committee agreed to receive a report at a forthcoming meeting on future plans for the former covered market area.

Members also received clarification that there were currently 74 empty Council House properties in the town. The condition of many of these properties was being assessed to ensure that they were fit for occupation.

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RESOLVED that

- 1) a report on future plans for the former covered market area adjacent to the Kingfisher Centre be included on the Committee's Work Programme; and
- 2) the report be noted.

59. PROMOTING SPORTING PARTICIPATION - UPDATE REPORT

Officers presented an update on actions taken to implement two of the recommendations from the Promoting Sporting Participation Task Group review which the Executive Committee had approved in June 2012 and which remained outstanding.

Regarding recommendation one, Members were informed that good progress was being made to improve the Council's website in line with the aspirations of the Task Group. In particular, it was expected that the Council's new Content Management System (CMS), to be introduced in 2015, would provide far greater flexibility than the existing system for Officers to tailor the content of the sports pages closer to what users actually wanted. This could involve placing a clear emphasis on promoting sporting activities in Redditch rather than the Council's sporting facilities. Social media would also be utilised more often to publicise these activities. Sufficient resources and staff capacity would need to be provided to make this work successful.

In terms of recommendation three, it was acknowledged that mistakes had been made, both internally and externally, which had contributed to delays in the introduction of some informal games areas. This was principally attributed to communication issues.

Officers were working to ensure that the following facilities were installed within specific timeframes:

- A circular table tennis table would be installed at Morton Stanley Park by the Easter Holidays in 2014.
- Volley Ball posts and court markings were due to be installed at Arrow Valley and Morton Stanley Parks by April 2014.
- Sports grids, measuring a total of 60metres by 40metres, would be installed in suitable locations within the Borough by the Easter Holidays in 2014. These would incorporate a number of different sporting activities, including rounders and softball.
- Improvements were due to be made to the new disc golf courses, including increased signage, course markings, and

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revised ground maintenance work, and completed by the Easter Holidays in 2014. This activity had already proved to be very popular since the courses had been introduced.

- Two new orienteering courses would be finalised in suitable locations by April 2014. Feedback received from a local orienteering club had been extremely positive.

The Committee was informed that suitable locations for the installation of giant chess or draughts boards had not yet been identified. Members suggested that Officers consider both the Forge Mill Needle Museum and town centre as potential venues. Support for these facilities was expressed by Members, who commented that the facilities would be well received, especially by elderly and minority ethnic local residents.

Members expressed their support for the proposed new sporting facilities within the Borough. However, Officers were urged to learn from the mistakes that had been made and to ensure that future plans were realistic and well communicated to help avoid any further disappointment.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

60. TRANSPORT ASSESSMENT AND MITIGATION PROPOSALS - PRESENTATION

The Committee noted a presentation that had recently been delivered by Worcestershire County Council (WCC) Officers at a private Planning Advisory Panel meeting on the potential impact of the Local Plan 4 on highways and actions that could be taken to mitigate that impact. (Appendix 1)

Member expressed their disappointment that WCC Officers had declined the Chair's invitation to attend the meeting to deliver the presentation. It had been communicated via Borough Council Officers that they did not feel it would be appropriate to deliver the presentation in a formal public meeting environment given that WCC was a statutory consultee on Local Plan 4 and was still considering its position ahead of its final submission. However, Members reiterated that the WCC should have been represented at the meeting as this would have been in accordance with an open and transparent consultation process. Members of the public in attendance also expressed regret that WCC Officers were not present to take questions regarding the proposals.

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Representatives of the local bus provider in attendance informed Members that they had not been consulted by WCC on the specific proposals outlined within the presentation regarding the proposed public transport routes in the suggested new developments in Foxlydiate and the potential alternative development in Bordesley, although they had earlier held general discussions with WCC regarding Local Plan 4. However, Members suggested that a previous bus operator in Redditch had been consulted about the potential costs implications of the two proposals.

Members queried whether there was any mechanism for including the current bus operator in the discussions regarding the viability of the proposed public transport routes in Foxlydiate and Bordesley. They were informed, however, that it was customary for bus operators to be excluded from costing up potential bus routes to help ensure that a fair tendering process resulted. The commissioning authority, in this case WCC, would therefore be expected to provisionally cost up the potential routes according to its own data.

The Committee raised a number of concerns and questions about the information within the presentation which could not be answered at the meeting. In particular, Members sought reassurance that this information did not in any way contradict the information they had already received during the Local Plan 4 consultation process. It was subsequently suggested that the relevant WCC Officers be invited to meet with Members to answer their questions regarding the proposed routes at a public meeting.

RESOLVED that

a public meeting be arranged between Officers from Worcestershire County Council and all Borough Councillors regarding the transport assessment and mitigation proposals within draft local plan No 4.

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

Members noted that a report on the issue of *Delivering New Affordable Housing* had recently been included on the Executive Committee Work Programme to be considered as an urgent item at its next meeting on 15th October 2013. Members agreed that they should contact the relevant Officers in advance of the meeting if there were any questions or comments they wished to raise.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the Executive Committee held on 17th September 2013 and the latest edition of the Executive Committee's Work Programme be noted.

62. WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor Smith informed the Committee that, in advance of presentation of a report on footpaths and pathways that was scheduled for consideration by the Committee in November 2013, she had recently met with relevant Officers in the Environmental Services Team to discuss the level of available information about footpaths and pavements in the Borough. Officers had produced a map of Woodrow which illustrated which pavements the County Council were responsible for maintaining, and those which were the responsibility of the Borough Council. It had become evident that it would be very onerous and an ultimately costly exercise for Officers to produce similar maps for the rest of the Borough.

As an alternative it was suggested that each Member could be provided with access to a Geographic Information System (GIS) that would identify which authority was responsible for maintaining each particular pavement in the Borough. However, the Committee felt that it would be simpler and more cost-effective if all Members referred to the relevant Officers who would be able to answer their individual queries about a particular pavement or pathway.

Ultimately, Members questioned the benefits of considering a report on this matter at their next meeting in November. It was consequently agreed that this report should be removed from the Committee's Work Programme.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the report on footpaths and pavements maintenance, scheduled for consideration on 4th November 2013 be removed from the Committee's Work Programme; and**
- 2) the Committee's Work Programme be noted.**

63. LANDSCAPING TASK GROUP - CONFIRMATION OF APPOINTMENTS TO THE GROUP

The Committee was advised that Councillors Joe Baker, Michael Braley, Michael Chalk and Yvonne Smith had been nominated to sit

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on the Landscaping Task Group. Councillor Hopkins had previously been confirmed as the Chair of the group.

RESOLVED that

Councillors Joe Baker, Michael Braley, Michael Chalk, Gay Hopkins and Yvonne Smith be appointed to the Landscaping Task Group.

64. TASK GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The following updates on current Task Group reviews were provided:

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

Councillor Gandy informed the committee that the Task Group had visited the Abbey Stadium on Thursday 26th September, which had provided them with some ideas about how the facility could potentially be improved. This was further backed up by informal discussions with a number of customers who had made their own suggestions. However, customers were generally satisfied with the stadium, its facilities, and the services that were provided.

Ahead of the site visit, Councillor Gandy had been informed by relevant Officers that the impending new business case for the stadium, due to be considered by the Executive Committee at the end of the year, would focus on reconfiguring the layout of the gymnasium and the dance studio. The group was therefore aiming to revise its original terms of reference to exclude any reference to the gymnasium and dance studio as it was not felt that they could realistically undertake a thorough scrutiny of these areas in the tight timescales required.

b) Joint Worcestershire Regulatory Services – Redditch Member, Councillor Alan Mason

In Councillor Mason's absence, Members received a brief summary of the first meeting of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) joint review which took place on Thursday 26th September.

The Committee was also informed that the joint review was conducting a consultation with all elected Members in Worcestershire to find out about their experiences of working with WRS. Members were invited to post their comments

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before the consultation closed on Thursday 31st October to give the joint review group a clearer understanding of the current perception of the service in Redditch.

c) Landscaping Task Group – Chair, Councillor Gay Hopkins

Following the Committee's earlier ratification of the Task Group's membership, Councillor Hopkins confirmed that the first meeting of the review would take place on Monday 14th October.

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

At their first meeting on Tuesday 1st October, the group received an overview of the Council's grants process. This included a summary of the work of the Grants Panel, and the Council's relatively new Concessionary Rents Policy. The group also considered the merits of co-opting a member of the local community onto the review, however, the Chair explained that the group would no longer be pursuing this option.

RESOLVED that

the update reports be noted.

65. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Witherspoon provided the Committee with a brief verbal summary of the most recent Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) meeting on 8th October 2013.

Members were informed that the HOSC was very disappointed with the level of progress regarding the development of acute hospital services in Worcestershire, following the conclusion of the Joint Services Review (JSR) in March 2013. A new twelve week consultation, led by the Worcestershire's four Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), had recently opened into the future of acute hospital care in the county. Two options remained on the table.

Elsewhere, the HOSC considered an update report on the Well Connected Programme that was intended to improve the coordination of health and care for local patients. This would include the introduction of a new information technology system for GPs in Worcestershire by March 2014.

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The issue of fifteen minute care visits for elderly patients at home was also discussed. The HOSC had been informed that these visits were geared towards meeting the needs of the patient and were not necessarily time specific.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.05 pm