

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 17th June, 2014

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Jane Potter (Chairman), Councillor Gay Hopkins (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Joe Baker, Natalie Brookes (substituting for Councillor Andrew Fry), David Bush, Carole Gandy, Alan Mason, Paul Swansborough and Pat Witherspoon

Also Present:

Councillor Rod Laight (Bromsgrove District Council, chair of the Joint WRS Scrutiny Task Group) and Mr Derek Taylor (Co-opted Member of the Abbey Stadium Task Group)

Officers:

S Brinkworth, K Dicks, and D Wheeler

Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and A Scarce

EXTRACT FROM THE MINUTES – MINUTE 5

ABBAY STADIUM TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT

Councillor Carol Gandy, as Chair of the Task Group, introduced the presentation and provided background information. Former Councillor, Derek Taylor was welcomed back as a co-opted member of the Task Group. It was confirmed that all Members of the Task Group had been in support of the six recommendations put forward in the report.

Members were provided with background information in respect of the scrutiny exercise and the areas which the Task Group had covered, which had included the scoping document being amended following details of a forthcoming business case for the Abbey Stadium being put forward. It was now understood that this had been delayed and would not be brought before the Executive Committee until the autumn.

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Chair

It was appreciated that in order to make improvements to the Stadium significant financial investment would be required. The Task Group had therefore looked at other ways to allow the Council to continue to provide the service as an alternative going forward. As part of the investigation the Task Group had therefore, following a visit to the Abbey Stadium, visited other leisure facilities throughout the country which were run by various types of leisure trusts.

Those visits included Evesham Leisure Centre, which was run by Wychavon Leisure on behalf of Wychavon District Council. The trust was run on a not-for-profit basis and from the information provided in a detailed interview with officers at the site it was understood the contract did not include any form of performance targets. It was a relatively new centre which had excellent facilities and Members had been very keen to note that the sauna and steam room were well used and looked upon as a good addition to encourage and maintain membership.

The Task Group had also visited Stratford Leisure Centre, which was of a similar age to the Abbey Stadium. This was run by Sports and Leisure Management Limited (SLM) on behalf of Stratford-on-Avon District Council. Members were provided with details of the contract history (they had held the contract at Stratford for over 20 years) together with how the centre was dual branded and had strict performance management targets to meet. SLM was much larger and worked with approximately 25 other local authorities, which enabled them to have access to an excellent IT system in order to monitor membership and undertake targeted marketing on a regular basis.

Councillor Gandy was keen to assure Members that under recommendation 1, the Task Group was not recommending a specific model of trust, as it had only looked at two options and Members were aware that there were many other types available. It was therefore imperative that if this recommendation was accepted then careful consideration was given to all options in order to make an informed decision and to ensure the best outcome for both the Council and its resident.

Councillor Mason provided a summary of the thinking behind recommendations 3, 4, and 5 and in doing so highlighted the following:

- The inclusion of therapeutic services in order to enhance the leisure centre experience.

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- The additional revenue that could be gained from these services via a franchise arrangement.
- Similarly the introduction of a sauna/steam room would be an additional benefit to encourage both the retention of current members and act as an incentive for new customers to join the centre.
- There were some off peak times, particularly during the day when the Task Group felt specific groups of residents could be encouraged to invest in membership at the Stadium.
- Specific marketing tools should be considered to promote the Stadium.

Former Councillor, Mr Derek Taylor, provided background information in respect of recommendation 6 and informed Members that he had found his previous experience as the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism invaluable during the investigation. Mr Taylor highlighted the following:

- The current limited amount and variety of goods available to purchase at the stadium and how this could be improved.
- Improvements which could be made to marketing and displays in order to increase sales and revenue.
- The possibility of a major sports supplier franchise being considered.

The Committee's attention was also drawn to the introduction of a car wash facility at the Abbey Stadium. Councillor Gandy provided background information in to this suggestion and explained that when this had been further investigated by the Task Group they were informed that there were a number of planning implications attached to this if it were to become a permanent fixture, including the disposal of the contaminated water. Officers had been keen to take this suggestion further and had already investigated the option of installing a temporary facility. However, the Task Group wished to draw to the Committee's attention the restrictions which the Council had faced in looking at this option as it was understood there were a number of car wash facilities throughout the Borough which might not be meeting the conditions set down by planning regulations.

Following the presentation the Task Group members and supporting Officers responded to questions and the Committee made observations, which covered the following areas:

- Concern over whether people were able to access the facilities without their membership cards being swiped, thus allowing those without membership to access the Stadium. Officers

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responded by acknowledging that this was a valid point and was an issue which was being addressed.

- “Checking in” at the reception desk (which would address the issue above) and concerns around members having to queue, which might be off putting.
- The location of the Stadium and the luxury of free parking being available.
- The positioning of merchandise and the type of goods which would be popular. Officers confirmed that “wet” products were the most popular items for sale.
- Officers confirmed that they believed the Abbey Stadium was the only local gym facility which allowed under 18s to be members.
- Staff discounts – Members requested details of what percentage of the overall membership were currently Council staff.
- Membership schemes, including families and couples.
- Expansion of the merchandise area and the inclusion of protein type products.

Officers suggested that Members might wish to consider what they saw as the purpose of the Abbey Stadium and the Leisure Team; whether it was to contribute towards the health and wellbeing of residents or purely to be run on a commercial basis. Members agreed it was important to encourage people to participate and enjoy a variety of sports. However, there was the potential for partnership working with GPs and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) which to address health and well being. Members also commented that it was important that the Abbey Stadium was inclusive for all and that those residents from the areas of highest need were encouraged and supported to use the facility.

Whilst discussing the option for a leisure trust to run the Abbey Stadium it was highlighted that a contract could contain whatever the Council wanted. Members expressed concerns that any decision taken on this subject should not be made solely by Officers as there was an opportunity for them to, indirectly, have a conflict of interest.

The Committee discussed the other leisure facilities within the Borough and the potential to extend trust arrangements to incorporate these facilities. Councillor Gandy explained that although it was acknowledged that these centres were in need of refurbishment it was not appropriate to include them within this Task Group’s recommendations as they had not been part of their terms of reference. She also explained that one of the trusts the group had investigated had also managed other areas such as theatres and museum on behalf of local authorities and this was

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therefore also an option that the Council could potentially explore in the future.

The Committee thanked the Abbey Stadium Task Group Members for the presentation and the detailed and informative report.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the Council should explore the option for the Abbey Stadium to be managed by a leisure trust;**
- 2) subject to the Executive Committee agreeing to investigate the trust management option further the Overview and Scrutiny Committee arrange to pre-scrutinise any final business case relating to the future operation of the Abbey Stadium;**
- 3) the provision of therapeutic services should be considered under any new trust arrangements put in place in future at the Abbey Stadium;**
- 4) the provision of a sauna/steam room should be considered under any new trust arrangements put in place in future at the Abbey Stadium;**
- 5) Officers should identify appropriate marketing measures to promote membership of the Abbey Stadium to people aged 55 years and over; and**
- 6) there should be expansion of the offer and additional marketing (including displays) of retain provision at the Abbey Stadium.**

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.18 pm