



Executive

Committee

24th June 2014

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Bill Hartnett (Chair), Councillor Greg Chance (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Juliet Brunner, Brandon Clayton, John Fisher, Phil Mould, Mark Shurmer and Debbie Taylor

Also Present:

Carole Gandy, Alan Mason and Yvonne Smith

Officers:

Emma Baker, Jess Bayley, Clare Flanagan, John Godwin, Sue Hanley, Lynn Jones, David Riley and Amanda de Warr

Committee Services Officer:

Ivor Westmore

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Rebecca Blake.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Bill Hartnett declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in Item 7 (Non-Domestic Rates – Discretionary Rate Relief Policy) as detailed separately at Minute 7 below.

3. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader advised that the minute extract from the most recent meeting of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee contained within the Additional Papers 1 pack should be read in conjunction with the report relating to item 5 on the agenda (Abbey Stadium Task Group – Final Report) for this evening's meeting.

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Chair

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 8th April 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. ABBEY STADIUM TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT

Councillors Carole Gandy and Alan Mason, representing the Abbey Stadium Task Group, presented the report prepared by their Group to the Executive Committee.

It was reported that the focus of the review was on exploring the options to extend the offer at the Abbey Stadium at minimum cost to the Council. The Group had been made aware early on in its review that a business case for expansion of the gym was in preparation and so had amended its scoping document to explore alternative options for making the Stadium a success.

The context of the review was a proliferation of other health and fitness centres in the town which was contributing to a gradual decline in membership numbers at the Abbey Stadium. The major recommendation of the Group was that alternative models for management of the Abbey Stadium and other leisure facilities within the Borough be explored. The Group had visited leisure centres in Evesham and Stratford and had determined that management by an external trust, such as was the case at these two centres, might lead to a reduction in costs whilst maintaining or improving the quality of services at the Abbey Stadium. In brief, the recommendations were as follows:

- That the option of the Abbey Stadium being managed by a leisure trust be explored;
- That, should the initial recommendation be agreed, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should pre-scrutinise any final business case relating to the future operation of the Abbey Stadium;
- That the provision of therapeutic services be considered;
- That the provision of a sauna/steam room be considered;
- That membership of Abbey Stadium should be promoted to those aged 55 or over; and
- That retail provision of leisure goods at Abbey Stadium be expanded.

A number of other matters, such as provision of car washing and the employment of apprentices, had also been considered during the course of the review.

The Executive welcomed the report and commended the Group on a fine piece of work. There was a general agreement that the Task Group, the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism, other Executive Members and Officers were of a like mind as regards the future management of the Abbey Stadium and the Council's leisure facilities more generally. The Committee was happy to accept the principle of the main recommendation, as expressed in an amended resolution which widened the scope to encompass leisure facilities more generally. Given that the third and fourth recommendations were dependant on the outcome of the exploration of various management options it was agreed that these be deferred. The Committee was content to agree the fifth and sixth recommendations as these could be enacted under the current management regime and were considered to be prudent measures which would assist in maintaining membership levels.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Council should explore the options for a leisure trust to manage some or all of its facilities, including the Abbey Stadium;**
- 2) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be given the opportunity to pre-scrutinise any final business case relating to the future operation of some or all of the Council's leisure facilities, including the Abbey Stadium, prior to its submission to the Executive Committee;**
- 3) consideration of the provision of therapeutic services be deferred pending the exploration of options for the future management of the Council's leisure facilities;**
- 4) consideration of the provision of a sauna/steam room be deferred pending the exploration of options for the future management of the Council's leisure facilities;**
- 5) Officers 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 retail provision at the Abbey Stadium.**

6. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME 2014 AND COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY

The Committee considered a report which contained a revised Local Development Scheme and a proposal that Officers be instructed to begin preparation of a Community Infrastructure Levy and Allocations Plan for the Council.

Officers explained that forthcoming meetings of the Planning Advisory Panel would be set aside to consider the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy. Members were informed that it was currently the intention of the Council to operate both Section 106 agreements and the new Community Infrastructure Levy alongside each other. The Committee was also reassured that the involvement of the Planning Advisory Panel would be in the preparation of the overall Community Infrastructure Levy Policy rather than in determining the levels of developer contributions from specific developments.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the contents of the report and the proposed amendments to the Local Development Scheme timetables be noted;**
- 2) Officers be formally instructed to begin preparation of a Community Infrastructure Levy and Allocations Plan for Redditch Borough Council; and**

RECOMMENDED that

- 3) Appendix A to the report, which includes the Council's forthcoming programme for planning policy documents from July 2014, be approved by Members.**

7. NON-DOMESTIC RATES - DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY

The Committee received a report setting out a new Policy to apply to Non-Domestic Rates discretionary relief awarded under the Local Government Finance Act 1988, and subsequent amending regulations.

The new Policy was aiming to bring consistency and fairness to the system of discretionary relief but there was an acknowledgement that it would have a financial impact on a number of organisations. Those organisations' concerned had been given 12 months notice of the change and there was transitional relief available to ameliorate any adverse financial impact. The criteria by which

organisations eligibility for relief was discussed. With regard to Paragraph 15.6 of the proposed Policy it was suggested that consideration of any appeal against a decision to refuse relief or against the level of the relief should be taken in conjunction with the relevant Portfolio Holder and the Leader of the Opposition. However, the general view was that this was a matter upon which the Portfolio Holder alone should be consulted as part of their role and, therefore, this proposal was not supported.

With respect to Paragraph 7 of the proposed Policy and the criteria of State Aid Declaration, Officers confirmed that the threshold of 200,000 euros was required to be expressed in euros.

RECOMMENDED that

the Non Domestic Rates – Discretionary Rate Relief Policy and Guidance attached as an appendix to the report submitted be adopted.

(Prior to consideration of this item Councillor Bill Hartnett, declared a disclosable pecuniary interest, in view of his position as Chair of Redditch Cooperative Homes and as a Board Member of Accord Housing group , and withdrew from the meeting. Councillor Greg Chance assumed the Chair during consideration of this item.)

8. LAND TO THE REAR OF MIDDLE HOUSE LANE

A report was considered which proposed amendment of a decision taken in relation to the disposal of a piece of land to the rear of Middle House Lane, Redditch.

In 2005 this piece of land had been declared surplus by the Council and it had been agreed to dispose of it in conjunction with a site belonging to Worcestershire County Council which sits adjacent and provides access to it. At the time the Council had specified that the land should be disposed of to a social landlord of the Council's choosing for the development of social housing.

The County Council was now seeking to dispose of its land at market value and, should the Borough Council not openly market its own site, would do so in isolation, leaving the Borough Council with the possibility of having to pay a premium or ransom to access its own site. Members noted that the description of the site was not entirely accurate as it was not bordered by Birmingham Road as specified in paragraph 3.12.

RECOMMENDED that

the land to the rear of Middle House Lane, Redditch be disposed of at market value.

9. REVIEW OF TOWN HALL CONCESSIONARY USE

Officers explained that the report submitted to the Executive Committee attempted to bring consistency and clarity to the system of providing concessionary use of the Civic Suite in Redditch Town Hall.

Members welcomed the clarity which the new Policy would bring. There was a suggestion that, in the event of disputes over the granting of concessionary use, the final decision be taken by the Leader in conjunction with the Leader of the Opposition, but this proposal was not supported.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the proposed booking and administration procedure (Appendix 1 to the report submitted) for Civic Suite Concessionary Room Bookings be approved and adopted; and**
- 2) Officers be directed to commence with the new procedure from Monday 30th June 2014.**

10. MAKING EXPERIENCES COUNT - CUSTOMER SERVICES MONITORING REPORT - QUARTER 4, 2013/14

The Committee received the report detailing customer feedback data for the fourth quarter of 2013/14, along with transactional data relating to the Customer Service Centre.

It was stated that the numbers of complaints had fallen significantly in comparison to previous quarters which was seen as evidence of the benefits of the introduction of a systems thinking approach to the provision of services. The time for the resolution of complaints was also falling in line with this reduction in overall numbers of complaints.

Officers provided a brief update on the Worcestershire Hub, noting that the work the Borough Council now did for the County Council was minimal and that the Hub had essentially ceased to exist in a meaningful form. The County Council now relied on online contact with its customers. One impact of this was a reduction in the financial subsidy provided to the Borough Council.

Finally, it was proposed that future Customer Service feedback and transactional data be provided to Members via the Members' Newsletter rather than in a quarterly report to the Executive Committee. Some Members were concerned that this would result in good news about improving customer performance not reaching the public. In support of the proposal, it was noted that Members would receive more regular updates on Customer Services performance and the relevant Portfolio Holder and Officers would ensure that good news was made public as and when appropriate. Officers also undertook to confirm for Councillor Brunner following the meeting the means by which the Members' Newsletter was circulated.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the contents of the report be noted; and**
- 2) **the information contained within the report in future be provided via the Members' Newsletter.**

11. QUARTERLY MONITORING OF WRITE-OFFS - QUARTER 4 2013/14

The Committee considered a report which detailed action taken by Officers with respect to the write-off of debts during the financial year 2013/14 and the profile and level of the Council's outstanding debt.

Officers noted that the total amount of irrecoverable debt written off by Officers during the year was well within the current bad debt provision. The Committee was also requested to use its discretionary powers to write-off three debts considered irrecoverable but for which the present Write-off Policy did not provide the necessary authority for Officers so to do.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the contents of the report be noted; and**
- 2) **the debt owing in relation to the three cases of debt detailed at Appendix 1 to the report submitted be written off as irrecoverable under the Executive Committee's discretionary powers.**

12. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 1st April 2014.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 1st April 2014 be received and noted.

13. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

The update on the activity of the Council's Advisory Panels and similar bodies was considered by the Committee. Officers undertook to advise Councillor Brandon Clayton of the date of the last meeting of the Housing Advisory Panel following the meeting.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

14. ACTION MONITORING

The Committee's Action Monitoring Report was considered by Members. Officers explained that, although key Members had been updated on the ongoing expenditure for securing the Hewell Road Swimming Baths site, a briefing had not been provided to all Committee Members. Officers also undertook to once again follow up the progress on the cost of holding the November meeting of the Executive Committee for Councillor Brunner.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.48 pm

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Chair