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Council

Monday, 27 July 2015

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Pattie Hill (Mayor), Councillor Joe Baker (Deputy Mayor) and Councillors Tom Baker-Price, Roger Bennett, Natalie Brookes, Juliet Brunner, Greg Chance, Anita Clayton, Brandon Clayton, John Fisher, Andrew Fry, Bill Hartnett, Gay Hopkins, Wanda King, Jane Potter, Antonia Pulsford, Mark Shurmer, Rachael Smith, Yvonne Smith, Debbie Taylor, David Thain, Jennifer Wheeler, Pat Witherspoon and Nina Wood-Ford

Also Present:

Mr I. McQuaid, Ms E. Morris and Mr D. Rose.

Officers:

Sheena Jones, Kevin Dicks, Clare Flanagan and Sue Hanley

Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley

27. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors David Bush, Michael Chalk, Matthew Dormer, Gareth Prosser and Paul Swansborough.

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

29. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 15th June 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

30. ANNOUNCEMENTS

a) The Mayor

The Mayor explained that she had attended a number of events in the community over the previous month. However, there were two key issues that she wanted to highlight:

- A group of six young people from Redditch were representing the UK at the World Scout Jamboree in Japan.
- A young resident from Redditch, Isabelle Rooke, had participated in the BMX national Championships.

b) The Leader's Announcements

The Leader referred to a number of recent events that he had attended. These included:

- The Redditch Has Talent show at the Palace Theatre, which had been entered by a range of talented local young people.
- The Kerala Cultural Association Redditch's Family Sports' Day at the Abbey Stadium.
- The Green Fair at the Arrow Valley Park delivered in partnership with the Redditch Lions.
- The Care Quality Commission (CQC) Listening Event at Redditch Town Hall. Further information about the outcome of inspections of Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust sites would potentially be available later in the year.
- Astwood Bank Carnival.
- Redditch Bandstand Event and music festival. There had been so much interest in participating in the music festival that the event had had to start an hour early and had eventually overrun in length.

31. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Leader responded to three questions that had been submitted in accordance with Procedure Rule 9.2 from Mr D. Rose, Ms E. Morris and Mr I. McQuaid as detailed below.

a) Borough of Redditch Local Plan No. 4 – Inspector's Hearing

Mr D. Rose asked the following question:

With regard to the BORLP4/BDP what are the Leader's views upon the HM Inspector's concerns as voiced at the hearing on the 23rd/24th June and outlined in his note posted 13/07/15?

The Leader replied as follows:

I am familiar with the Inspector's post hearing note and the initial response from officers to the Inspector.

The Inspector is tasked with providing independent scrutiny to the plan making process. This is a good thing. I am pleased that the Inspector has recognised the amount of work that has already gone in to preparing Local Plan No.4. Work on the emerging plan commenced in 2007.

As offered by the Inspector in paragraph 21 of his recent note, the Council's next steps will be to consider how to take the plan forward in light of the concerns raised. This piece of work is commencing (on both the SA and the evidence base as applicable). It is recognised that this extra work will delay plan making for several months but this relatively modest delay (in the context of how long it takes to prepare a plan) is necessary.

After the Local Plan examination for Local Plan No. 4 re-convenes the Inspector will let us all know of his final conclusions. As you are no doubt aware the continued progression of Local Plan No. 4 will be very much in the public arena and via the Inspector you will be able to let your views be known about the next steps.

A supplementary question was raised about how the concerns raised by the Planning Inspector would be addressed by the Council and the approach that would be adopted in future to considering whether to undertake housing development in Webheath.

The Leader responded by suggesting that this question had already been addressed in his previous answer.

b) Borough of Redditch Local Plan No. 4 (BORLP4) – Sustainability Appraisal

Ms E. Morris asked the following question:

Regarding BORLP4/BDP and particularly the HMI's concerns with the problematic Sustainability Appraisals, are you happy with the quality of this Local Plan and confident that the points he raised can be addressed by your officers?

The Leader explained that his answer to Mr D. Rose's question also applied in his response to Ms E. Morris's question.

A supplementary question was raised concerning the approach that would be adopted by the Council's Planning Department to ensure that a fair approach was adopted to scoring when identifying sites suitable for development in the Borough.

The Leader's response emphasised that he had no concerns regarding the approach that would be adopted by the Council's Planning Department. He also suggested that he had already addressed this question in his previous response.

c) Planning Policy Documents – Funding

Mr I. McQuaid asked the following question:

What Council grants, allowances or funds are available to assist your residents in paying for external advice on planning policy documents?

The Leader replied as follows:

Unfortunately there is no grant. Residents could turn to an organisation called Planning Aid, though there is no guarantee that assistance will be provided.

A supplementary question was raised concerning the use of residents' personal finances to fund responses to draft copies of the BORLP4 and the extent to which the Leader believed that this expenditure was justifiable.

The Leader responded to this question by referring back to the answers that he had already provided to these questions.

32. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The Leader responded to two questions submitted in accordance with Procedure Rule 9.2 from Councillors Tom Baker-Price and Juliet Brunner as detailed below.

a) Economic Productivity

Councillor Tom Baker-Price asked the following question.

Following the recent statistics showing unemployment in the Borough is at the lowest level in a decade, can the Leader explain to the Council how Redditch's economic policy written in 2007 is able to meet the current economic challenge of improving economic productivity?

The Leader replied as follows:

I would like to thank Councillor Baker-Price for his question.

Firstly it is worth acknowledging that in June 2015 unemployment in Redditch (as measured by the number of residents claiming Job Seekers Allowance - JSA) stood at 769 people, or 1.4% of the resident population. It is pleasing to note that this rate is well below the West Midlands rate of 2.2% and the national rate of 1.7%.

However I would also add that some of those in employment may be in part time jobs, zero hours contracts, low paid jobs or minimum wage jobs.

The Council does have a published Economic Development Strategy which covers the period 2009-2018 and was approved in July 2009. It is worth reflecting that the number of residents claiming JSA for Redditch in August 2008 (as published in the Strategy) stood at 1,230, so we have seen nearly a 40% reduction in the number of Redditch residents claiming JSA over the last seven years.

Clearly, we want to see a further reduction in the unemployment rate in Redditch, but we are on an upward curve and making positive progress. We also want to see well paid secure skilled jobs in Redditch.

The economic environment has changed significantly since 2008, as we have moved through a major economic recession into a period of recovery.

The economic development environment has also changed significantly. When the strategy was originally published we were required to work with Regional Development Agencies, Regional Assemblies and Regional Spatial Strategies - they are now all gone.

The agenda has changed and the Council is actively working with the two Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) - it is a member of both the Worcestershire LEP and the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP (GBSLEP). The Council is also engaged in the discussions around the emerging Combined Authorities.

The economic conditions are changing and we are seeing a renewed appetite for investment in the manufacturing sector, a sector which is vital for Redditch and supports 8,500 jobs, that's nearly 24% of the total employment for Redditch. The manufacturing sector is becoming more efficient and productive and Redditch is well placed to capitalise on further growth in high value sectors such as automotive, aerospace and engineering.

The future development of sites, such as “The Redditch Eastern Gateway”, have the potential to support new inward investment into the area and provide high value employment opportunities for our residents. A recent report estimated that the development of the Redditch Eastern Gateway will create up to 1,200 new net jobs for Redditch as well as adding a net figure of at least £100m per annum of Gross Value Added (GVA) to the local economy, which will help to address the challenge outlined by Councillor Baker-Price around economic productivity.

The Council will continue to work with its partners to ensure that local businesses continue to invest in and support our local workforce and to invest in apprenticeships. On this front, it is particularly pleasing that a Redditch apprenticeships employer event, supported by the Council, recently attracted over 30 small/medium businesses and the outcome was that 40 new apprenticeship opportunities were generated. The Council is committed to supporting young people into apprenticeship opportunities and wants to retain as much local talent and skills within Redditch as possible.

Taking into account the passage of time since the current Economic Development Strategy was published and the changing economic circumstances we find ourselves in, the Council is currently refreshing its set of economic priorities and plans to ensure that it reflects current opportunities and challenges. I have sought the input of local partners and businesses into this process through the Economic Development Theme Group, a partnership of members and people from the business, voluntary and education sectors, and we have agreed themes of Skills, Enterprise, Vibrant and Confident.

A report will come to the Executive Committee in September and this will set out the new economic themes and priorities and our future plan of activity.

A supplementary question was subsequently raised by Councillor Baker-Price asking the Leader to inform the Council of any barriers to economic productivity that he was aware of which could have a negative impact on the living standards of Redditch residents.

The Leader replied by explaining that the Council was not complacent and recognised that there would always be the need to explore additional opportunities to enhance economic productivity. The Council would continue to work with partners to attract new companies and employers to the Borough and

to work with partner organisations to achieve the best for Redditch.

b) Combined Authorities

Councillor Juliet Brunner asked the following question:

Does the Leader agree with me that a combined authority should provide a better service for its residents than the sum of its parts - and that the services provided to each entity within any new combined local authority should be better than prior to amalgamation, or combining and in answering can the leader confirm that, in accordance with local authority statutes, all meetings concerning external matters - specifically, combined authority discussions - are minuted how many such meetings has the leader had where issues to do with any combined authority, or local authority amalgamation, have been an agenda item, can he summarise the discussions and will he confirm that he will be attending all future meetings?

The Leader replied as follows:

I'd like to thank Councillor Brunner for her question.

In answering however I have to say I am disappointed that Councillor Brunner felt the need to ask the question, given that I asked for a report to be brought to the last meeting of the Executive Committee which outlined the current position with regard to Combined Authority discussions. I would also like to point out that I didn't really need to bring the report to the Executive Committee but I wanted to ensure the Executive Committee, and ultimately the Council, were fully aware of discussions. Furthermore Councillor Brunner took part in those discussions and voted in favour of the proposed delegated authority.

I'd also like to quote from the draft minutes of the Executive:

"Members agreed that it was in the best interests of the town for the Council to have a presence at the discussions, in order to be able to ask questions and ascertain what was on offer for Redditch. It was agreed that the Chief Executive would email Members every couple of weeks to provide them with an update as to the position and any key discussions which had taken place."

I am sure that the Chief Executive as promised will e-mail Members with an update as to on-going discussions.

Turning to the first part of Councillor Brunner's question, I think that Councillor Brunner may be confused as to what a

Combined Authority is or could be. In answering I will simply repeat what I stated at the Executive Committee; that I want what is best for Redditch and we won't know what is on offer unless we join in the discussions, so the simple answer is yes.

In terms of the second part of the question again I think Councillor Brunner may be confused about statutes – she may want to clarify what local authority statutes she is referring to – I am assuming that she is referring to outside bodies. If this is the case they are not bound by local authority statutes but by their own rules and regulations. The only ones I believe that are considered to be outside bodies are the GBSLEP, the GBSLEP Supervisory Board and the Worcestershire LEP. As Councillor Brunner knows the Council is represented by Councillor Campion on the GBSLEP and Councillor Sherrey on Worcestershire LEP but I would reiterate that no decisions are taken there with regard to a combined authority. I sit on the GBSLEP Supervisory Board and have attended the meetings where Combined Authorities have been discussed. A summary of those discussions were contained in the report to the Executive Committee less than a couple of weeks ago. Agenda for the GBSLEP are on the GBSLEP website and minutes of Worcestershire LEP Board meetings are on the Worcestershire LEP website.

As previously stated earlier the Chief Executive has been asked to provide an update with regard to Combined Authority discussions.

Other meetings that will cover the Combined Authority discussions will be Worcestershire Leaders' Board, GBSLEP Leaders' Board, a leaders and officers group from the proposed West Midlands Combined Authority area and the northern alliance meeting (Redditch, Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest Leaders and Chief Executives). I can confirm that, barring unforeseen circumstances, I should be attending those meetings; if I cannot then I can send a substitute).

Following the Leader's response clarification was requested concerning the requirements the combined authority to be reported to the Executive Committee. The Chief Executive explained that delegated powers had already existed to enable him and the Leader to meet with partner organisations to discuss the Combined Authority concept further. However, to ensure that the process was transparent a decision had been taken for a report to be presented on this subject at the 14th July 2015 meeting of the Executive Committee.

A supplementary question was subsequently proposed by Councillor Brunner in respect of the date when the Chief

Executive's first update report would be made available for Members' consideration.

The Chief Executive explained that he had been on leave when the latest meeting to discuss the Combined Authority had taken place. The Deputy Chief Executive had attended in his absence and would be providing him with a summary of the outcomes of this meeting. It was anticipated that an update on the outcomes of this meeting would be provided for Members' consideration by the end of July. Members were also asked to note that this was a fast moving agenda and this would be reflected in the updates that would be provided.

33. MOTIONS ON NOTICE

No motions had been submitted.

34. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Members considered the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 14th July 2015.

Review of the Operation of Leisure Services

Council discussed the Review of the Operation of Leisure Services. A number of points were raised during consideration of this item including:

- The use of balances to offset the savings identified in the budget for 2015-16 and the impact of this on the Council's overall budget.
- The content of the Options Appraisal and the information that had been provided in this document about the length of time it would take to implement any changes.
- The length of time that had been taken to review leisure services to date.
- The role of the Abbey Stadium Task Group in proposing that the Council investigate the potential for a trust to manage the Council's leisure services.
- The benefits for residents of making an informed decision about the future operation of leisure services.
- The need to undertake a balanced assessment of both the financial savings that could be secured as well as the best way to ensure quality services for the customer.
- The potential for further financial savings to be secured through service transformation.
- The option for Overview and Scrutiny to undertake a more detailed investigation of this subject and to make suggestions regarding the future operation of leisure services.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 14th July 2015 be received and adopted.

35. REGULATORY COMMITTEES

The Council received the minutes from meetings of the Audit, Governance and Standards and the Planning Committees.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the minutes of the meetings of the Planning Committee held on 10th June 2015 and 8th July 2015 be received and adopted; and**
- 2) the minutes of the meeting of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee held on 2nd July 2015 be received and adopted.**

36. REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION

Council considered a report outlining updates that had been proposed to the Council's constitution.

RESOLVED that

- 1) that the Council's constitution as presented be approved with the following changes;**
- 2) that the Petitions scheme be removed from the constitution, the ability to present petitions at Council and Executive Committee meetings being retained and the petitions protocol be agreed; and**
- 3) that the Council procedure rules be amended to remove references to two-thirds majority votes.**

37. MEMBERSHIP OF LICENSING SUB-COMMITTEES

RESOLVED that the following changes be made to the membership from the Conservative Group on the Licensing Sub-Committees:

- 1) Premises (Sub-Committee A) – Councillors Tom Baker-Price and Antonia Pulsford with Councillor Gay Hopkins as substitute.**
- 2) Taxis (Sub-Committee B) – Councillors Anita Clayton and Roger Bennett with Councillor Gay Hopkins as substitute.**

38. URGENT BUSINESS - RECORD OF DECISIONS

There were no urgent decisions to note.

39. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

There were no separate items of urgent business to consider at this meeting.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 7.54 pm

