

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 8th December, 2015

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Jane Potter (Chair), Councillor Gay Hopkins (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Joe Baker, David Bush, Andrew Fry, Gareth Prosser, Paul Swansborough, Jennifer Wheeler and Nina Wood-Ford

Also Present:

Councillors Tom Baker-Price and Pat Witherspoon

Officers:

J Godwin, S Hanley, J Pickering, C Walker and J Willis

Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and A Scarce

49. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no apologies for absence.

50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

Councillor Andrew Fry declared an other discloseable interest in Minute No.53. Fees and Charges 2016/17 due to his personal family connection to the Head of Community Services.

51. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the Minutes of the meeting held on 6th October 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

52. BEREAVEMENT SERVICES REVIEW OF CREMATION FEES AND CHARGES AND PROPOSED CAPITAL WORKS - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Chair reminded the Committee that Members had asked to pre-scrutinise all proposed fees and charges for 2016/17 and this report formed part of that pre-scrutiny work. She then invited the Officers to present the Bereavement Services, Review of Cremation Fees and Charges and Proposed Capital Works Report.

Officers explained that a review of the service had recently been undertaken which had enabled the team to look at how it was operated together with the feasibility of the building. In order to carry out the feasibility study advice from external consultants had been obtained focusing on the Council's current position in the national league table of cremation fees and charges and how this had changed in recent years. It was found that the current average fee at Redditch crematorium of £540 was some £106 lower than the national average. If an 8% increase was implemented in the first year the average cost would still be significantly lower than the national average. Comparison with other nearby authorities had also been made and it was noted that the Council had not increased fees in line with the general increase applied by others over a number of years.

Within the fee structure Officers had been mindful to take into account potential issues around funeral poverty and had lowered the fee for particular time slots. They had also ensured that cremations and burials for residents and non-residents under the age of 18 were free to assist bereaved families who suffered the loss of a child.

It was noted that there had been limited investment, other than regular maintenance, in the aging structure of the facility and it had been identified that this might lead to potential unforeseen and costly maintenance issues in the future. It was therefore proposed that a number of improvements be made, as detailed within the report, including the heating system, improvements to the toilet facilities and catafalque improvements. The income from the increase in fees would be offset against the borrowing costs of these improvement works.

Following presentation of the report Members discussed the number of areas in detail:-

- The actual cost of a cremation. Officers confirmed that a breakdown of that cost was not possible using the current

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system but it was hoped this would be available under the proposed new system.

- Any bench marking exercise which the Council carried out on a regular basis.
- Whilst Members agreed with the provision of free cremations and burials for those aged under 18 years, it was questioned whether this should be restricted to those living or being educated in the Borough.
- It was also suggested that the age should take account of those still in education rather than under 18 years of age.
- Members highlighted that whilst the Council charges were “cheap” the service provided was of a very high standard.

RECOMMENDED that the following proposals from Officers concerning Bereavement Services, review of Cremation Fees and Charges and Proposed Capital Works be endorsed:

- 1) the cremation fees for 18 years + are increased as per the table at 3.7;**
- 2) the fees previously applied to 17 year olds are amended to start at 18 years old for both residents and non-residents for both cremations and burials;**
- 3) facility and heating improvements are approved as per the list at paragraph 4.10;**
- 4) a sum of £200K in capital funding be added to the existing £144K making a total of £344K to enable a programme of capital works to take place in 2016; and**
- 5) a proportion of the increased income from amended fees is used towards repayment of the capital borrowing costs.**

53. FEES AND CHARGES 2016/17 - PRE-SCRUTINY

Officers presented the Fees and Charges Review 2016/17 report and in so doing highlighted to Members that this was the first time the Committee had been able to review it within the statutory timescale and in an updated format. There was a recommended increase of 3% on all fees and charges, with a number of exceptions as detailed within the report. Members were reminded that the fees and charges for Building Control were not included in order to improve efforts to maintain and increase its market share, following the increasing numbers of rival private sector firms providing a similar service.

The Chair thanked officers for improvements to the format of the report. Members were then given the opportunity to bring forward any particular queries and these included the following:

- The option for an incentive or some sort of loyalty bonus to be introduced for existing members of the Abbey Stadium Gym.
- Building Control – Members commented that it was difficult to be competitive when the Council did not provide some of the services and encouraged customers to use other providers.
- Swimming lessons and the shortage of teachers. Officers provided background information in respect of the national trend and comments received from the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) at a recent meeting. It was confirmed that a number of options were being considered.
- The role of apprentices in Leisure Services and the loss of trained instructors, together with details of the recruitment process and timescales to replace those instructors.
- The aging equipment at the Abbey Stadium and the potential budget bid which would be put forward in due course.

RECOMMENDED that the fees and charges as detailed in the Review of Fees and Charges for 2016/17 report be endorsed.

54. LEISURE SERVICES OPTIONS SHORT, SHARP REVIEW - FINAL REPORT

Councillor Jane Potter, Chair of the Leisure Services Options Short, Sharp Review, gave a presentation on the findings of the Review together with details of its recommendations. This covered the following areas:

- Background to the review.
- The group's vision for leisure and cultural services in the borough.
- Areas which were investigated and how the investigation was carried out including the issuing of a questionnaire and the responses received from various local authorities.
- The findings from the questionnaires and subsequent visit to Chase Leisure Centre – managed by an external trust.
- Details of the three recommendations together with supporting evidence.
- Additional information for consideration within the report.

Other members of the review group commented on how impressed they had been with the work carried out at Chase Leisure Centre in particular; the partnership working that was being carried out, the

investment in such things as gym equipment and the significant savings that had been achieved.

Following the presentation of the report Members discussed a number of points in more detail including:

- The timing of the report in view of the work that Officers were carrying out and reference to the work of the previous Abbey Stadium Task Group.
- The inclusion of other facilities within a leisure trust, for example the Palace Theatre and Forge Mill.
- The financial implications and legal costs involved in all leisure trust options and the impact on staff.
- The potential to further develop the shared service with Bromsgrove District Council in the future.
- The current condition of the equipment in the Abbey Stadium and a capital bid which would be coming forward in the future.
- The contractual implications of a trust option and the importance of that contract covering the specific needs and requirements of the Council.
- The responses received from other local authorities to the questionnaire and the extent to which the demographics of those local authorities were similar to that of the Borough.
- The cost of TUPE transferring staff if a leisure trust option was considered, the potential for redundancies following the transfer and whether the Council would be responsible for these.

RESOLVED that

consideration of the Leisure Services Options Short, Sharp Review's recommendations be deferred until completion of the work by Officers in March 2016.

55. REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF LEISURE SERVICES

The Executive Director, Finance and Resources explained that she was presenting the Leisure Intervention Update Report as she was the lead Director for the strategic purpose; "providing good things to see, do and visit" and provided background information as to the purpose of the report.

The aim of the report was to present feedback from the intervention and transformation work which continued to take place at the Abbey Stadium and the dual use sites, to discuss wider data and demand analysis and to propose the next steps in this work. This included the usage figures and trends and a significant number of benefits

across the Borough. From the initial data which had been collated it was clear that there remained significant work to be carried out. However, from the investigations so far it was clear that the Council supported a variety of other stakeholders in delivering their objectives within our community. The financial benefit to those stakeholders was an area where further investigation was needed. In respect of the dual use facilities, there had in the past been limited knowledge of the users and the work had highlighted the important role which those facilities played in the community in areas such as social inclusion and preventing anti-social behaviour.

Following the detailed presentation of the report Members raised a number of points, which were discussed:

- Reference was made in the report to rationalisation and Members questioned what areas this referred to. Officers confirmed that specific areas had not as yet been identified.
- Forge Mill Needle Museum and the potential to promote this facility further to attract people into the town.
- Whilst it was acknowledged that this was a good report concerns remained around the cost of providing the service as a whole and the potential for making savings using current service delivery models without making cuts to those services.

RECOMMENDED that the following proposals from Officers concerning the Leisure Intervention Update Report be endorsed:

- 1) further work on identifying the health and well-being impact on our community of the provision of the Leisure offer;**
- 2) report back on the opportunities for improvements as identified in the detailed schedules;**
- 3) a review of revenue received and any opportunities to increase revenue by assessing alternative pricing models; and**
- 4) discuss with the Academies how the provision in the dual use sites can be better provided to support the wider community.**

56. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN - PRESENTATION

Officers delivered a short presentation covering the recent announcements arising from the Comprehensive Spending Review.

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There had been some significant areas highlighted which could potentially impact on the Council, however there was currently insufficient detail to be able to report back to Members accurately. She therefore provided Members with a high level briefing on the following areas:

- Retention of Business Rates by the Council
- Reductions in Revenue Support Grant contributions to local government.
- Reserves and Assets
- Capital Receipts
- The New Homes Bonus

Heads of Service were working towards providing further information about potential savings and any bids or pressures which they anticipated in the foreseeable future. The settlement details for the Council were expected on 16th December 2015. Officers suggested that an additional meeting of the Committee, in mid-January 2016, would ensure that more detailed information arising from this settlement could be provided for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the presentation in respect of the Medium Term Financial Plan be noted; and**
- 2) **an extra meeting of the Committee take place in mid-January 2016 in order to receive a more detailed update on the Medium Term financial Plan 2016/17 to 2018/19.**

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

Officers informed Members that there were no updates from the Executive Committee Minutes from the meeting held on 13th October 2016. However, an updated copy of the Executive Committee's Work Programme had been tabled at the meeting following its publication earlier in the day and it was noted that a number of items had been postponed.

RESOLVED that

the Executive Committee Minutes of 13th October 2015 and the latest edition of the Executive Committee Work Programme be noted.

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58. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Officers confirmed that, in consultation with the Chair, the item in respect of the Housing Benefits presentation had been postponed in recognition of the Committee's current workload.

As previously agreed, the Committee confirmed that Officers should canvas dates for an additional meeting later in January 2016.

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme be noted subject to the amendments as detailed in the pre-amble above.

59. TASK GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

Joint Worcestershire Increasing Physical Activity Task Group –
Redditch Borough Council Representative, Councillor Gareth
Prosser

Councillor Prosser confirmed there had been further meetings since his last update covering a number of areas. The date for completion remained January 2016. However Councillor Prosser was not optimistic about this deadline being met. It was thought that the respective representatives from the Districts would be expected to present the final report to their own Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

60. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Wood-Ford, the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), provided Members with an update from the most recent meeting. This had covered two main areas, the draft Joint Health and Well-being Strategy 2016-19 and Cancer Services. Reference had been made to a rise in dementia sufferers and a delay in the treatment of skin cancer sufferers due to the retirement of the specialist. It was also confirmed that the next meeting would be held on 9th December and in light of the recent developments the representatives from the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust would be attending in order to provide an update.