

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 7th December,
2017

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Jane Potter (Chair), and Councillors Michael Chalk, Matthew Dormer, Andrew Fry, Pattie Hill, Gareth Prosser, Jennifer Wheeler and Nina Wood-Ford

Officers:

Kevin Dicks, Chris Forrester and Dean Piper

Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley

49. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Gay Hopkins and Paul Swansborough and it was confirmed that Councillor Michael Chalk was attending as a substitute for Councillor Hopkins.

50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

51. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 26th October 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

52. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - PRESENTATION (HEAD OF NORTH WORCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION)

The Head of Economic Development and Regeneration for North Worcestershire delivered a presentation which updated Members

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Chair

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on the action that was being taken in respect of economic development within the Borough (Appendix 1). During the delivery of this presentation the following points were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- The Council's economic priorities were adopted by the Executive Committee in September 2015.
- The North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration Unit (NWEDR) provided relevant services in relation to economic development on behalf of Redditch Borough Council.
- The Economic Development Theme Group, a sub-group of the Redditch Partnership, provided useful feedback on the views of businesses in respect of economic development in the Borough.
- Economic development also underpinned many of the Council's strategic purposes, particularly 'help me run a successful business'.
- The Council and businesses in Redditch could access the Worcestershire Business Central and Greater Birmingham and Solihull Growth Hubs for business support.
- Businesses had been consulted about economic development within the Borough as part of a piece of work jointly commissioned by the Council and NWEDR. This had found that many businesses were concerned that there was a perception issue in relation to the impression people had of Redditch.
- Issues had also been identified during consultation in respect of the aspirations of local young people and their potential to move into high value occupations.
- There were also difficulties in terms of Redditch residents earning low wages compared to those living in other parts of the region, with the majority of higher salary jobs in the Borough taken by staff who lived outside Redditch.
- There was the potential for existing industrial estates within Redditch to be redeveloped in order to attract more businesses to the area.
- The One Public Estate initiative was a project that was being delivered in partnership and investigating the potential to maximise the public estate to the benefit of the local community and economy. A report on this subject would be presented for Members' consideration in the New Year.
- A new Engineering Centre of Excellence had been opened to help address skills shortages in the local economy.

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- The Opening Doors to Business initiative had been launched locally to provide young people with an opportunity to experience working in a small business environment.
- The Redditch Town Centre Partnership was working hard to enhance the economic profile of the town centre. As part of this consideration was being given to the introduction of a Redditch Improvement District (BID), though this remained at the feasibility stage.
- The NWEDR and the Council had submitted an expression of interest to the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) for £5 million in grant funding. The LEP had concluded that the position of Redditch was essential to the delivery of the partnership's business case, though no final decision had yet been taken as to whether the bid for funding would be successful.
- The Council and NWEDR were working constructively with Capital and Regional, the owners of the Kingfisher Shopping Centre, on a range of development projects.
- A review of economic performance within the Borough had discovered that Redditch's economy appeared to be similar to that of Birmingham. Where nationally the economy experienced growth Redditch often experienced recession, partly due to the local economy's reliance on manufacturing.
- As well as being a member of the GBSLEP and Worcestershire LEP the Council was a non-constituent member of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and every attempt was made to access funding from these bodies.
- The WMCA could not achieve its strategic economic plans without locations such as Redditch performing well. This meant that there needed to be investment in non-constituent as well as constituent members of the combined authority.

The Committee raised a number of points in relation to economic development within the Borough during consideration of this matter:

- The skills shortages within the Borough and action that could be taken to address this. Members were advised that this related to a range of sectors in the economy and the NWEDR was working closely with HOW College to try to address this.
- The potential opportunities for economic development that might arise from the Eastern Gateway, subject to the outcomes of the planning process.
- The need to foster a balanced economy that would allow small and medium businesses to grow into larger premises whilst remaining in the local area. Members were advised that the Growth Hubs could potentially help businesses with this.

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- The influence of landowners over economic development in the area, and the work of officers to meet with landowners to discuss development opportunities.
- The contribution that the Council's Acquisition and Investment Strategy could make to stimulate the local economy.
- The need to proactively market Redditch to businesses that might be interested in locating to the area and the work that the Worcestershire LEP was due to undertake to promote the Borough.
- The action that would be taken to market Redditch and the timing of this. Officers advised that a plan would be developed over the following 12 months and the aim would be to take advantage of major development opportunities, such as the Eastern Gateway project, to promote the town to businesses.
- The requirements in respect of economic development with the Local Plan and the definition provided within the plan for the location of the town centre.
- The ambitious plans of the Council and partner organisations in the One Public Estate exercise, which included a focus on developing the town centre beyond the strict definition of that geographical area, as set out in the Local Plan.
- The purpose of a BID area. Officers advised that in such areas a levy could be imposed on business rates and the money collected spent on local initiatives. This could only be introduced with the support of businesses in the area which would have an opportunity to vote on the matter.
- The opportunities provided to Redditch by HS2, which had recently included a briefing at Osprey House attended by a range of local businesses.
- The links between the Council and NWEDR with the retail sector in the Borough. Officers explained that this was particularly strong in the town centre, due to the work of the Redditch Town Centre Partnership, though more could be done to enhance links with shops in outlying areas.
- The productivity levels within the Borough, which were lower than the regional average. Members were advised that other areas were struggling with productivity and this was a problem in the region.

At the end of these discussions Members thanked Officers for a detailed presentation and

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

53. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2018/19 TO 2021/22 - UPDATE FOR PRE-SCRUTINY (FINANCIAL SERVICES MANAGER)

The Financial Services Manager presented the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2018/19 to 2021/22 Update Report and in so doing advised that the 2018/19 budget as presented within the current four year MTFP resulted in a balanced budget with £1.111 million savings to be delivered. In the Autumn Statement on 22nd November 2017 it had been announced that the Housing Revenue Borrowing Cap would be removed and there would be increases to the living wage. The implications of this had been taken into account as part of the Council's approach to managing the budget.

Members noted that it was likely the financial position of the Council would become clearer at the end of the calendar year. For this reason the Committee agreed that it would be premature to make any recommendations in respect of the budget at this stage.

RESOLVED to

note the progress against the budget timetable and the key issues from the Autumn Budget.

54. FEES AND CHARGES 2018/19 - PRE-SCRUTINY (FINANCIAL SERVICES MANAGER)

The Financial Services Manager presented the Council's proposed Fees and Charges for 2018/19. Heads of Service had reviewed the fees for services within their remit so that the level at which charges had changed, if at all, from the previous year varied.

The Chair advised that the Budget Scrutiny Working Group had pre-scrutinised the Fees and Charges report on 6th December. During this meeting Members had noted that there would be a significant increase to a small number of services, including Lifeline and some of the services provided at the crematorium. There were also a number of services listed where no increase was being proposed to the fees charged by the Council. Officers had been asked by the group to provide information in writing in relation to these fees, copies of which would be circulated for the consideration of members of both the working group and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to the Council meeting on 29th January 2018.

In this context, given that further information had been requested, the Committee determined not to make any recommendations on this subject at this stage.

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RESOLVED that

the Fees and Charges 2018/19 report be noted.

**55. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME - SELECTING
ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY**

Members considered the minutes from the Executive Committee meeting held on 31st October 2017. The Committee was advised that during this meeting recommendations made by the Homelessness Short Sharp Review and the Performance Scrutiny Working Group in respect of After Care Social workers had received the support of the Executive Committee. However, the Executive Committee had rejected the Staff Survey Joint Scrutiny Task Group's proposal for a lead scrutiny Member for staff and the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management to attend staff briefings due to concerns that this could cause discomfort for Council employees.

The Executive Committee had also considered scrutiny recommendations that had been made on 26th October 2017 in respect of the Local Discretionary Relief Scheme and the Leisure Options Appraisal report respectively. The Executive Committee had agreed with the scrutiny proposal that a Local Authority Trading Company (LATC) should manage the Council's Leisure and Cultural Services in the future but had rejected the suggestion that the leader of the opposition should be consulted by the Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Resources alongside the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management about adjusting the percentage relief in the Local Discretionary Relief Scheme.

Members also considered the latest edition of the Executive Committee Leader's Work Programme, for the period 1st January to 30th April 2018. The Committee agreed that, due to the importance of the item to the Council, and given the previous scrutiny of Leisure Services undertaken by Members, the Leisure and Cultural Services Business Case should be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work programme for pre-scrutiny.

56. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Members noted that the agenda for the 11th January 2018 meeting of the Committee was relatively busy. Many of these items would involve pre-scrutiny of items on the Executive Committee's Work Programme and therefore could not be rescheduled. However,

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there was a presentation due from the Place Partnership which could be rescheduled and Members agreed that this should be postponed for consideration later in the year.

The Matchborough and Winyates District Centres Redevelopment Consultation remained listed on the Committee's Work Programme for pre-scrutiny. However, consideration of this item by the Executive Committee had been postponed and no date had yet been set for the matter to be discussed. Therefore a date for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider the item could not yet be confirmed.

57. TASK GROUPS, SHORT SHARP REVIEWS AND WORKING GROUPS - UPDATE REPORTS

a) Budget Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Jane Potter

The latest meeting of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group had taken place on 6th December 2017. During this meeting Members had considered the following, which had all been subject to pre-decision scrutiny:

- The Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules. The group had been advised that 80 per cent of Council business was valued at up to £5,000. Under the current rules staff were only required to make competitive enquiries in respect of expenditure under £5,000. The new rules were proposing that this arrangement should apply to expenditure under £3,000 and that written quotations should be required for expenditure valued at between £3,000 and £25,000. The group had welcomed this change to the rules.
- The Acquisition and Investment Strategy. The strategy would enable the Council to operate in a more commercial manner and to take advantage of any business opportunities.
- Fees and Charges 2018/19.
- Financial Monitoring Quarter 2 Update Report.

b) Civil Contingencies Short Sharp Review – Chair, Councillor Gareth Prosser

Councillor Prosser advised that the review was progressing well. The group had recently interviewed a representative of Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service and was due to receive written feedback from a couple of other

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Category One organisations. The review remained on target to report back to the February meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

c) Performance Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Matthew Dormer

Councillor Dormer advised that the latest meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Working Group had taken place on 13th November. During the meeting Members had interviewed officers about abandoned shopping trolleys and had looked at some of the measures listed on the measures dashboard for the strategic purpose 'help me run a successful business'. Unfortunately the group had experienced a few technical problems accessing the dashboard at this meeting and therefore the Head of Business Transformation and Organisational Development and the ICT Transformation Manager had been invited to attend the following meeting of the group on 18th December 2017 to discuss these issues further.

The Committee was also advised that the Member Support Steering Group had nominated members of the Performance Scrutiny Working Group to act as Member Champions in respect of the dashboard.

58. EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - UPDATE REPORTS (COUNCILLOR NINA WOOD-FORD)

Councillor Nina Wood-Ford provided updates in respect of the following external scrutiny bodies:

a) WMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Wood-Ford explained that during the latest meeting of the WMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members had considered data from the authority's performance dashboard and performance trends. Subjects such as air quality in the region and the new data protection regulations due to come into force in 2018 had also been discussed alongside issues relating to economic growth.

The WMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been advised that there were aims to increase the number of apprenticeships within the region from approximately 42,000 at present to 84,000 by 2030.

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The WMCA had been given permission to recruit new staff to support the authority's Committees. It was anticipated that this would have a positive impact on the capacity of bodies such as the WMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Updates had also been provided during the meeting on the work of the Committee's various Task and Finish Groups. The Mental Health Task and Finish review, to which Councillor Wood-Ford had been appointed, was progressing well and investigating the potential for Housing First to be introduced across parts of the region. Officers assured Members that the Council was working closely with the WMCA in respect of Housing First as it was recognised that this had been highlighted in both the Mental Health Task Group and Homelessness Short Sharp Review Group's findings.

The Land Commission Task and Finish Group had identified challenges with meeting housing targets and had been investigating the potential for alternative providers to help supply social housing in the region. Modular homes had been raised as a possible option as part of these discussions.

The Skills and Productivity Task and Finish Group had been investigating skills pathways as well as how the region compared to other parts of the country.

Finally a Budget Task and Finish Group had recently been established. This would start to undertake work shortly.

b) Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC)

Councillor Wood-Ford reported that the latest meeting of Worcestershire HOSC had been cancelled.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.20 pm